

Horizon

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

THE NEW DISORDER

by E. M. FORSTER

TWO BRAVE MEN

(I) *by* ARTURO BAREA

(II) *by* LUIS PORTILLO

INTRODUCTION TO BALZAC

by RAYMOND MORTIMER

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HORIZON

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

Vol. IV No. 24 December 1941

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COMMENT

THIS number marks the end of *Horizon's* second year. Last Christmas we appealed for more readers and more writers, and they came to our help. In the middle part of the year we were threatened with extinction, but paper difficulties have so far been surmounted, though only for the time being. Here again the friends of *Horizon* helped us to a temporary settlement.

This lull gives us an opportunity to explain a little more about our position.

Like every newspaper with a paper ration we have not nearly enough. To develop a magazine on the trickle which we are allowed is to try to grow figs from a window box. Since we can never increase either the number of pages or the circulation beyond a point which we have long since reached, the only way in which we can expand is vertically—by raising the price. This was done in August and *Horizon* now costs the same as a package of cigarettes. If the increasing costs of production unpeg us from this standard we may have to raise the price again, or adopt even severer measures for restricting our circulation, such as the employment of a staff of experts to write on military matters, a 'Planning' number, or a symposium on the position of the artist in the post-war world. Meanwhile, with only seventy-two pages we have to ration contributors. Some months we must omit poems, others short stories or book-reviews. Since book-reviews are to be found in daily and weekly papers while the long critical articles which crowd them out are a speciality of *Horizon* alone the reviews are bound to suffer, and for this we would apologize to the publishers who so generously advertise and who receive such slight attention, and also to the authors who send their books, and to the reviewers who are caught in this bottleneck of our production. Thus there are several books for which we have at present no space and which it would have been pleasant to review this Christmas. There is Philip Toynbee's *School in Private* (Putnam's, 8s. 6d.), which began in *Horizon* as *First Day of Term*, and which is now an admirable novel giving a deep and truthful picture of a preparatory school. Toynbee has penetrated the totems and tabus of both boys and masters, and one ends the book with a sigh—'This man can write'. Another remarkable

book is Bowyer Nichol's anthology, *Words and Days*, with an introduction by Logan Pearsall Smith (Oxford, 5s.). This anthology was first published in the 'nineties and is interesting, both as representing, like the *Golden Treasury*, the highest and purest taste of another generation, and for its extremely subtle arrangement, so that while turning over this calendar of beauties one is continually catching a glimpse of the austere and ironical personality of its collector, as if billeted in an old house whose owner is away. Other books of which reviews will follow are Huxley's biographical tract *Grey Eminence* (Chatto 15s.), Quennell's wise fastidious narrative of *Byron in Italy* (Collins, 12s. 6d.), and the new folio of *New Writing* (Hogarth Press 7s. 6d.).

Now that *Horizon* has survived two years most of the misconceptions about it have been removed. One or two still seem to linger.

Horizon is NOT a responsible magazine. It cannot always celebrate centenaries or tercentenaries, or chronicle literary deaths. Nor can it keep up with books of the month, films of the month, art exhibitions or plays.

Horizon is not a political magazine. Were it to become closely associated with any political movement, with its over-simplifications of existence, it would cut itself off from the good writers who exist in others; we follow our writers as a porpoise follows the herring shoal—when they are all to be found off the same bank we will stay there. Naturally, there is a tendency to associate with the groups of progressive writers in their thirties to which the editors by age and temperament belong, and when good writing becomes militant and political so will a magazine which mirrors it. Meanwhile we feel that while political truths are not ascertainable, the values of art are, and to that extent *Horizon* has no convictions, only standards.

Horizon is an adult periodical. It does not exist to give young writers their first chance. We regret that so few 'little magazines' are left, but we do not wish their fate to overtake us. *Horizon* has chosen rather to represent the best writing available; the deepest imagination, the clearest thought of the English, American, French, Spanish, German and Hungarian writers on which it can draw to the exclusion, alas, of much promising writing, until it has matured a little. It is factual rather than theoretical, and must exclude the experimental on the one hand, and the superficial on

the other if it is to concentrate on the well-documented yet impassioned writing at which it aims.

One experiment of which no mention has been made is *Horizon's* Begging Bowl. This was beginning to provide real help to writers, but with the cessation of the advertisement (for reasons of space) contributions have fallen off. One author received a cheque for ten pounds, several, including the editor, benefited to the extent of five, the guineas mounted up, and no writer was contemptuous of an occasional half-crown. We would repeat that *Horizon* authors are in our judgment underpaid, and that by sending them gratuities the readers of *Horizon* are forming themselves into a new patron class whose arrival is, by all our writers and painters, most ardently desiderated.

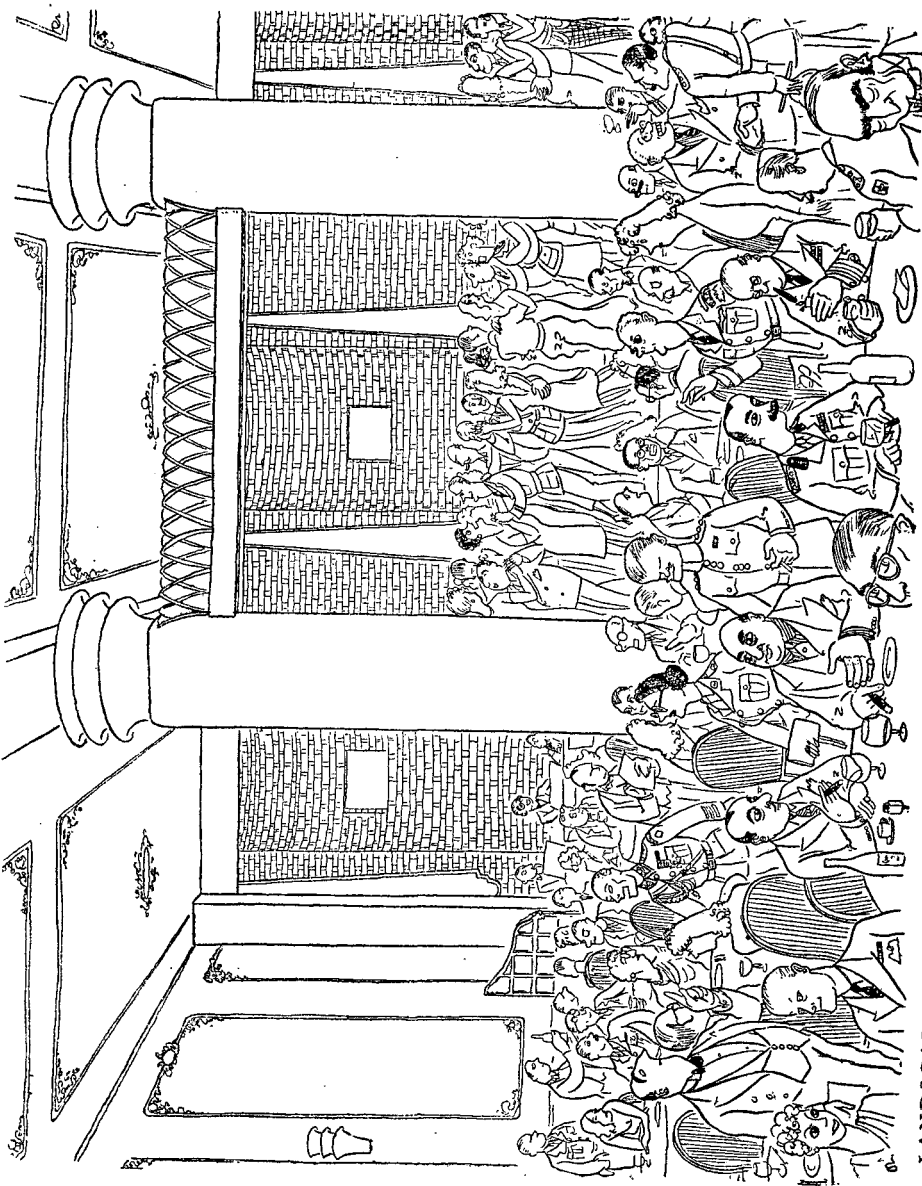
Besides greeting the benefactors of the Begging Bowl *Horizon* also wishes a merry Christmas to all subscribers, to all its readers in the armed forces, by whose virtue alone we continue to exist, to our friends in America who helped us in our difficulties, especially *Decision*, *The Gotham Book Mart*, *The New Republic*, *Nation*, *Time*, and *Partisan Review*, and to the British Council, the Hon. Harold Nicolson, and Sir Kenneth Clark, our defenders in England. Also to all the readers and contributors, advertisers and booksellers who have helped with their interest and advice, a merry Christmas.

ABOUT THIS NUMBER

The article by Arturo Barea is from a further volume of autobiography dealing with the Moroccan war which will be published next Autumn by Faber. It will be seen that, with the account by Portillo (a young law professor from Salamanca now in this country) the two form a composite picture of the youth and age of fascism in the person of Millan Astray, a Fascist general seen first as a man in action, and secondly as an old skull full of evil ideas.

★ ★ ★ ★

Numbers 12-23 of *Horizon* are now out of print, but we offer for sale at 10 guineas or 50 dollars each four complete sets of *Horizon*, numbers 1-24.



OSBERT LANCASTER

LANDSCAPE WITH FIGURES—II

E. M. FORSTER

THE NEW DISORDER

I

IN every creative writer there is a touch of the poet, the maker, even if his medium is prose; otherwise he would not trouble to create. And from the poet-writer's standpoint all this prevalent talk about a New Order is sheer waste of time. There never will be a new order, and there never has been an old one. The phrases are good enough for statesmen, who identify order with orders and creation with regulations, but the poet-writer must be more accurate than that. Order is something evolved from within, not something imposed from without, it is an internal stability, a vital harmony, and, in the social and political category, it has never existed, except for the convenience of historians. Viewed realistically, the past is merely a series of messes, succeeding one another by discoverable laws no doubt, and certainly marked by an increasing growth of human interference; but messes all the same. And what I hope for and work for to-day is for a mess more favourable to artists than is the present one, for a muddle which will provide them with fuller inspirations and better material conditions. It will not last—nothing lasts—but there have been some advantageous disorders in the past, for instance in ancient Athens, in Renaissance Italy, eighteenth-century France, periods in China and Persia, and we may do something surreptitiously to hurry the next one up. But let us not be fooled again, or fix our hearts where true joys are not to be found. We were promised a new order through the League of Nations. It never came, nor will it come after this war, even if this war be followed by anything as old-fashioned as a peace. We must give up this particular illusion. And let us not be abashed by the people who reproach us and themselves for not having tried harder, and who declare that if we had all played less in the twenties and theorized less in the thirties, the jelly of civilization would have slid out of its mould and stood upright in a beautiful shape. These people are suffering from remorse—that

'last infirmity of noble mind' which can be so trying to a fellow patient—and they must be left to the ravages of their peculiar disease. Try harder? Try till you burst. The real trouble lies elsewhere.

The trouble has often been diagnosed, but it is always being dodged or minimised by the moralist. It is the implacable offensive of science. We cannot reach social and political stability for the reason that we continue to make scientific discoveries and to apply them and thus to destroy the arrangements which were based on more elementary discoveries. If science would only discover and never apply, if, in other words, men were more interested in knowledge than in action, mankind would be in a much safer position. The stability statesmen talk about would be possible, there could be a new order, based on vital harmony, and the earthly millennium might approach. But Science shows no signs of doing this; she gives us the internal combustion engine, and before we have digested it and assimilated it with terrible pains into our system, she will harness the atoms or the tides, and destroy the new order which seemed to be evolving. How can man get into harmony with his surroundings when he is constantly altering them? The future of our race is, in this particular direction, more unpleasant than we care to admit, and each time Mr. Wells and my other architectural friends anticipate a great outburst of post-war activity and world-planning, my heart contracts. To me, the best chance for future society lies through apathy, uninventiveness, and inertia. If this war is followed—as it may be—by universal exhaustion, we may get the Change of Heart which is at present so briskly recommended from a thousand pulpits. Universal exhaustion would be a new experience. The human race has never undergone it, and is still too cocky to admit that it may be coming, and might result in a sprouting of new growths through the dung and spittle. Order, in the social and political category, is unattainable under our present psychology.

And it is not inherent in the astronomical category either, though it was for many years relegated there. The stars, the Army of Unalterable Law, with which George Meredith discomfited Lucifer and comforted the Victorians, prove to be a flying rout of suns and galaxies, rushing away from the solar system and from one another, bursting like H.E.'s, wobbling like the dollar or

the pound, and with orbits as veering as any European frontier. No longer can we find a suitable contrast to chaos in the night sky. The heavens and the earth have become terribly alike during the last twenty years.

No—there appear to be only two possibilities for order in the entire universe. The first of them is the divine order; available for those who can contemplate it. We must admit its possibility, on the evidence of the mystics, and we must believe them when they say that it is attained, if attainable, by prayer. ‘O thou who changest not, abide with me’ said one of its poets. ‘Ordina questo amor, o tu che m’ami’ said another. Intellectuals are such puritanical devils, that they usually recoil with horror when prayer is mentioned. But to be shocked by prayer is as prudish as to be shocked by sex; anyhow I can find nothing scandalous in exploring and practising its technique, as Gerald Heard and others are now doing, although I have no aptitude myself.

The second possibility is the æsthetic order—the order which an artist can create in his own work. A work of art is a unique product. But why? It is unique not because it is clever or noble or beautiful or enlightened or original or sincere or idealistic or useful—scraps of those qualities lie all over the shop and it may embody any of them—but because it is the only material object in the universe which may possess internal harmony. All the others have been pressed into shape from outside, and when their mould is removed they collapse. The work of art stands up by itself, and nothing else does. It achieves something which has often been promised by society but always delusively. Ancient Athens made a mess—but the Antigone stands up. Renaissance Rome made a mess—but the ceiling of the Sistine got painted; Louis XIV made a mess—but there was Phèdre; Louis XV continued it, but Voltaire got his letters written. Art for Art’s sake? I should just think so, and more so than ever at the present time. It is the one orderly product which our muddling race has produced. It is the cry of a thousand sentinels, the echo from a thousand labyrinths, it is the lighthouse which cannot be hidden; *c’est le meilleur témoignage que nous puissions donner de notre dignité.*

Consequently I hold that the artist ought to be an outsider, and that the nineteenth-century conception of him as a Bohemian was a just one. The conception erred in two particulars: it

postulated an economic system where art could be a full-time job, and it stressed idiosyncrasy and waywardness rather than order. But it is a truer conception than the B.B.C. and M.O.I. one, which treats the artist as if he were a particularly bright government advertiser, and encourages him to be friendly and matey with his fellow-citizens and not to give himself airs. Estimable is mateyness, and the man who achieves it gives many a half-pint of pleasure to himself and to others. But it has no traceable connection with the creative impulse, and probably acts as an inhibition on it. The artist who is seduced by mateyness may stop himself from doing the one thing which he, and he alone, can do—the making of something out of words or sounds or paint or clay or steel or film which has internal harmony, and presents order to a permanently disarranged planet. This seems worth doing, even at the cost of being called uppish by journalists. Some months ago, before it was itself eclipsed by the superior opacity of a body called Cassandra, *The Times* published an article called ‘The Eclipse of the Highbrow’, in which the ‘average man’ was exalted, and all contemporary literature was censured, with the exception of Lord Elton. Commenting on this article, Sir Kenneth Clark wrote in a memorable letter: ‘The poet and the artist are important precisely because they are not average men; because in sensibility, intelligence, and power of invention they far exceed the average.’ These words of Clark’s and particularly the words ‘power of invention’ are the Bohemian’s passport. Furnished with it, he slinks outside the fortifications of society, saluted now by a brickbat and now by a coin, and accepting either of them with equanimity. He does not consider too anxiously what his relations with the mess inside may be; or listen too intently to the drone of the remorse-mongers as they remind him that he is partially to blame. He can hear something more important than that—namely the invitation to create order—and he knows that he will be better placed for doing it if he attempts detachment. So round and round he slouches, with his hat pulled over his eyes and maybe with a louse in his beard.

As our present society disintegrates, this démodé figure will become clearer; the Bohemian, the outsider, the parasite, the rat—one of those figures which have at present no function either in a warring or peaceful world. It is not very dignified to be a rat: but all the ships are sinking, which is not dignified either—the business

men did not build them properly. Myself I would sooner be a swimming rat than a sinking ship—at all events I can look around me for a little longer—and I remember how one of us, a rat with particularly bright eyes called Shelley, squeaked out 'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world' before he vanished into the waters of the Mediterranean.

What laws did Shelley propose to pass? None. The legislation of the artist is never formulated at the time, though it is sometimes discerned by future generations. He legislates through creating, and he creates through his sensitiveness and his power to impose form. Without form the sensitiveness perishes. And form is as important to-day, when our tools are blasted and our canvases slashed and our typewriters jammed, as it ever was in those happy days when the earth seemed solid and the stars fixed. Form is not tradition. It alters from generation to generation. Playwrights no longer observe the unities, musicians are no longer interested in composing sonatas. They seek a new technique and will do so as long as their work excites them. But form of some sort is imperative. It is the surface-crust of the internal harmony.

II

The above remarks were originally addressed to fellow-writers: hence their particular angle. They are the substance of a speech made this autumn at the seventeenth International Congress of the P.E.N. Club. I called it 'The New Disorder' and the title shall stand, but I was really trying to clear up my mind on the subject of the various categories which have laid claim to the possession of Order. They may be thus summarized:

(i) The social and political category. Claim disallowed on the evidence of history and of our own experience. If man became a different animal, order here might be attainable; not otherwise.

(ii) The astronomical category. Claim allowed up to the present century, but now disallowed on the evidence of the physicists.

(iii) The religious category. Claim allowed on the evidence of the mystics.

(iv) The æsthetic category. Claim allowed on the evidence of various works of art, and on the evidence of our own

creative impulses, however weak these may be, or however imperfectly they may function.

My speech had a kind reception, but when the Congress had applauded, it reverted to what it considered important and did not discuss the issue raised. This was natural, and I raised the issue with diffidence, for we had with us representatives from about thirty nations, many of whom had suffered, all of whom had cause for fear. Politics had not ignored them, so how could they ignore politics? They had private knives to sharpen, local armour to don, a few of them wanted revenge, all wanted security, and they valued literature only if it helped their particular cause or what they regarded as the good of humanity. Their speeches were eloquent, sincere, and distinguished, but they were more interested in pamphlets and squibs than in books; and I realized that as soon as I myself had been hurt or frightened I should forget about books too.

Yet even when we are universally hurt and frightened, even when the cause of humanity is lost, the possibility of æsthetic order will remain and it seems well to assert it at this moment and to emphasize the one aspect in which an artist is unique. I hope it is not callous to do this, and certainly no callousness is intended.

The toad beneath the harrow knows
Exactly where each pinpoint goes;
A second toad, upon the road,
Preaches contentment to that toad,

as Kipling would have written, if civilized. The second toad does not indeed preach contentment, for he can already feel the reverberation of the approaching tanks. But he has escaped hitherto, and is therefore better placed for asserting the existence and the pertinacity of art. He has a little vantage-ground, and looking back into the past we see that that is all that there has ever been: little vantage-grounds in the changing chaos, where bubbles have been blown and webs spun, and the desire to create order has found temporary gratification, and the sentinels have managed to utter their challenges, and the huntsmen, though lost individually, have heard each other's calls through the impenetrable wood, and the lighthouses have never stopped sweeping the thankless seas. In this pertinacity there seems to me, as I grow older, something more and more profound, something which does in fact concern people who do not care about art at all.

TWO BRAVE MEN

(I) THE LEGION by ARTURO BAREA

WE were among the first to arrive. Only the artillery and the commissariat had come before us. On the crest of the hill we saw the outline of eight guns pointing towards the valley. At the foot of the hill the commissariat had pitched their tents; there rose a strong smell of straw and horses. We had been allotted the slope by the captain of the General Staff who organized the encampment. Within half an hour our tents were set up and the kitchen fires burning.

The hill rose from a stubble-covered plain. The barley had just been cut. Far back in the rear we could see the huts of a Moorish village which had surrendered a few weeks before. At this distance the ugliness of its hovels was softened and it looked a homely enough place in the middle of harvested fields. Our cone-shaped tents, scattered over the hillside, looked as though the village were preparing for a fair.

Our captain had suggested to the captain of the General Staff that we should be given the open field for our camping ground. The answer had been: 'It is reserved for the Legion'. Our captain had pulled a wry face.

The Legion arrived in the afternoon, a whole battalion—they call it *bandera*, Standard—which was to go into action for the first time. Their tents were quickly pitched. At the far end of the camp, barrels of wine were lined up beside two square tents: the canteen and the brothel. The soldiers of the Legion began to crowd round the casks and the tents; they started drinking and 'making love'.

Together with the other sergeants, I watched the bivouac of the Legion growing below us.

'Those are the new Americans,' said Julian. 'I suppose most of them are here because they've been duped.'

'Duped? Don't tell us that anybody comes here by mistake.'

Córcoles said: 'There are still some saps left in the world. They'll have heard fine words about the Mother Country and

her daughter nations in America, and so the grandchildren have come here. Well, they won't find these four years much fun.'

A legionary was coming up the hill towards us. Córcoles pointed to him:

'Where's he going? I think he's got on to the wrong floor.'

In those days it was the rule for legionaries and ordinary Spanish soldiers never to mix.

When the man came nearer I recognized him. It was Sanchiz. We waved to each other. Córcoles turned to me:

'So you know him?'

'Yes, he's an old friend of mine.'

'Nice friends you've got.'

Meanwhile, Sanchiz had arrived.

'Hullo, how are things? I've come to fetch you. We've got some first-class wine down there. They told me your company was here, so if you're free, come along with me.'

We went down the hill together; Sanchiz had taken my arm. The legionaries looked at me askance. We met a sergeant with the face of an old lag and he asked Sanchiz threateningly:

'Where are you off to with that fellow?'

'He's an old friend of mine. Come on and have a glass,' said Sanchiz.

'No, I'm on guard to-night, and if I start drinking, I'm lost.'

The caterer was a thin, yellow-skinned old man with transparent ears and a nose like a beetroot. He was so deaf that we had to shout our orders and point with our fingers at what we wanted. As a rule, the wine which was sold to the forces in Africa contained a shameless dose of water and half a dozen chemicals to prevent quick fermentation. But this wine was excellent, dry and strong, so that you had to smack your tongue against your palate.

'What do you do to stop them putting water in your wine?'

'*El Sordo* takes jolly good care not to play tricks. Otherwise he wouldn't have a sound bone left in his body—to say the least.'

'But how is it you're here? I thought you were doing office work in Ceuta and living like a prince.'

'Wine's to blame for that. I got tight, and the captain sent me along with these new fellows for two months. I've got to teach them. They're a lousy crowd. Sons of niggers, and Chinks and Red Indians. To hell with them. They talk to you, all

sweetness, and as soon as you turn your back they stick a knife between your ribs. A rotten lot. Just look at their faces. . . . I wonder what Millan Astray will say to them to-morrow.'

'Has he come here, too?'

'Yes, and to-morrow at ten he's going to address them. Come and listen. He's terrific. I'll come and fetch you at your tent.'

The abstemious sergeant joined us: 'You've made me envious. Will you stand me a glass?'

He drank in slow sips, staring at me.

'Is he really a friend of yours, Sanchiz?'

'Yes, he's like a brother to me. Or rather, like a son, for I could be his father.'

The sergeant offered me a huge calloused hand:

'If that's so, I'm glad to meet you.' He took another sip. 'And if you are his friend, why don't you come with us? If I were in his skin,' he said to Sanchiz, 'you'd see—I'd be a lieutenant to-morrow.'

'Don't be a fool. A sergeant-major at the most. But he's no good for us. We scared him stiff in the tavern of *El Licenciado*.'

The din round the wine casks was infernal, it was impossible to understand one another. Sanchiz and I parted at the boundary of the Legion's camp. Walking up the slope, I wrestled with the problem of my old repugnance against the Tercio, and remembered the tavern of *El Licenciado* in Ceuta.

Spanish taverns usually paint their doors red. That one in the little square behind the church of Our Lady of Africa had been lavish with red paint. The harsh vermilion of red lead had been daubed on doors, tables, three-legged stools, the bar and the shelves, laden with bottles. The tavern was like a bleeding gash in the white-washed front wall. Outside, the sun had bleached the red colour to a dirty pink. Inside, smoke had blackened it to the shade of dried blood. The landlord was an old convict from the penal colony on Monte Hacho; he went about in a dirty sleeveless vest, with the hairs of his chest sticking through the mesh. His customers were legionaries and whores. His nickname—'The Licenciate'—was a reference to his convict past and a cheap joke at the same time. The wine was greenish-red and tasted of copper-sulphate. To drink it, you had to have a thirst such as *El Licenciado* produced by serving chunks of sun-dried bonito along with the glasses of wine. The fish hung in a row from a beam

above the long bar. Slit open from head to tail and spread-eagled on bamboo frames, they looked like small kites. The same beam carried two hooks from which two oil lamps hung suspended on twisted bits of wire. At night, *El Licenciado* lit the lamps, and their smoke licked slowly at the dried fish until they were dyed black and tasted of oily soot.

At noon the tavern was empty. A woman or a legionary would come in for an instant and take away a bottle of wine. Towards nightfall, the customers drifted in. I went there some evenings while the bar was still deserted, to wait for Sanchiz. The first to come would be a lonely legionary who sat down near the light, and wrote, nobody ever knew what. Then came an avalanche of men who had finished their duty at the office of the Ceuta delegation of the Tercio. They leant against the bar in a row and argued about who was to stand whom drinks. After a time some started a game of cards, others sat down in small groups round a square flagon of wine, and a few went away. The women came only with the darkness. Their coming coincided with the lighting of the lamps. Mostly, they were accompanied by a casual bed-fellow of theirs who had invited them to a drink afterwards. Others came to look for someone and asked for him from the doorstep. Then they were invited to sit down, and entered. A few regular customers came simply to drink and to find somebody who would pay for their drinks.

The cross-fire of blasphemies, the barbarous language, the smoky light, the red paint and the metallic wine filled the tavern with a naked brutality which was scarcely disguised, and indeed, rather heightened by the uniforms. The women added the high lights: they were old, corroded by disease, in rags of glaring colours, hoarse from syphilis and alcohol, their eyes red-rimmed. When the women came, the blasphemies tore through the room like the lashing of whips, in a sexual battle between males and females. Sometimes a man slapped the wrinkled cheek of a woman, sometimes someone caught a trestle in his fury and lifted it above another's head.

When the quarrels went beyond the limits of the Licentiate's code, he slowly left his place behind the counter, moving like a boar, and put the adversaries outside into the little square without saying a word. Then he turned and slowly fastened the latch of the door. The door had no bolt and was a simple glass

pane with short red muslin curtains. Yet I never saw anybody attempt to force the entry. The tavern-keeper was taboo through a mixture of physical fear of his murderous past, and of instinctive dread that the tavern might be closed, being, as it was, one of the few which belonged to the Legion.

That tavern had for me the same fascination which the first visit to a lunatic asylum has for a normal person: repulsion, fear, and the attraction of the unknown horror of madness. Through the peculiar code of the lawless, I was a sacrosanct person there, for I did not belong to them and yet was the friend of one of them. But this contact imbued me with a fear, almost a terror, of the Tercio, which has lasted all my life.

On the eve of a battle there is always the nervous tension born of the risks to be run. That night I found it difficult to sleep, but my nervous tension, my fear, rose from the stubble field where the barley had been cut, and not from the other side of the hills, where the advance guards were firing at each other in the darkness.

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Lieutenant-Colonel Millan Astray came out of the tent, followed by a couple of officers. The crowd fell silent. The Commander stretched his bony frame, while his hands mangled a glove until it showed the hairs of the fur lining. The whole might of his stentorian voice filled the encampment, and the noises from the bivouacs of the other units died down. Eight thousand men tried to hear him, and they listened.

'Caballeros legionarios!'

'Gentlemen of the Legion . . . yes, gentlemen! Gentlemen of the Tercio of Spain, offspring of the Flanders Tercios of old. Gentlemen! Some people say that before coming here you were I know not what, but anything rather than gentlemen: some, murderers, others thieves, and all with your lives finished—dead! And it is true what they say. But here, since you are here, you are gentlemen. You have risen from the dead—for don't forget that you have been dead, that your lives were finished. You have come here to live a new life for which you must pay with death. You have come here to die. It is to die that one joins the Legion.

'What are you? The Betrothed of Death. You are the gentlemen of the Legion. You have washed yourselves clean, for you have come here to die. There is no other life for you than in this

Legion. But you must understand that you are Spanish gentlemen, all of you, knights like those other legionaries who, conquering America, begat you. In your veins there are some drops of the blood of Pizarro and Cortés. There are drops of the blood of those adventurers who conquered a world and who, like you, were gentlemen—the Betrothed of Death. Long live Death! . . .

'Viva la Muerte!'

Millan Astray's whole body underwent an hysterical transfiguration. His voice thundered and sobbed and shrieked. Into the faces of these men he spat all their misery, their shame, their ugliness, their crimes, and then he swept them along in fanatical fury to a feeling of chivalry, to a readiness to renounce all hope, beyond that of dying a death which would wash away their stains of cowardice in the splendour of courage.

When the Standard shouted in wild enthusiasm, I shouted with them.

Sanchiz pressed my arm:

'He's a grand fellow, isn't he?'

Millan Astray went round the circle of legionaries, stopping here or there before the most exotic or the most bestial faces. He stopped in front of a mulatto with thick lips, the liverish yellow-white of his rounded eyeballs shot with blood.

'Where do you come from, my lad?'

'What the devil's that to you?' the man answered.

Millan Astray stared straight into the other's eyes.

'You think you're brave, don't you? Listen. Here, I am the Chief. If anyone like you speaks to me he stands to attention and says: "At your orders, Sir. I don't want to say where I come from." And that's as it should be. You've a perfect right not to name your country, but you have no right to speak to me as if I were the likes of you.'

'And in what are you more than I am?' The man spat it from lips wet with saliva as if they were on heat.

At times, men can roar. At times men can pounce as though their muscles were of rubber and their bones steel rods.

'I . . . ?' roared the commander. *'I am more than you, more of a man than you!'* He sprang at the other and caught him by the shirt collar. He lifted him almost off the ground, hurled him into the centre of the circle and smacked his face horribly with both hands. It lasted two or three seconds. Then the mulatto

recovered from the unexpected assault and jumped. They hit each other as men in the primeval forest must have done before the first stone axe was made. The mulatto was left on the ground nearly unconscious, bleeding.

Millan Astray, more erect, more terrifying than ever, rigid with a furious homicidal madness, burst into the shout:

‘Attention!’

The eight hundred legionaries—and I—snapped into it like automatons. The mulatto rose, scraping the earth with his hands and knees. He straightened himself. His nose poured blood mixed with dirt like a child’s mucus. The torn lip was more bloated than ever. He brought his heels together and saluted. Millan Astray clapped him on his powerful back:

‘I need brave men at my side to-morrow. I suppose I’ll see you near me.’

‘At your orders, Sir.’ Those eyes, more bloodshot than ever, more yellow with jaundice, held a fanatical flame.

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Dawn was breaking. At the bottom of the vale, where the river ran, the light was pushing against the blue-black of the sky. Suddenly the flame of the sun rose, and its red disc showered crimson stains on the waters. From the height where we were posted, the light seemed to creep up the mountain slopes and the shadows stretched across the valley, immense and shapeless. The crests were illuminated by the light coming from below, and the tree-tops glowed as though the trunks were on fire. The smoke columns from the shelled *kabila* were tainted red as though the flames had flickered up once more.

Our artillery protected the advance. We saw the fast Moorish cavalry riding uphill and the infantry of the *Regulares* running between the shrubs and the dwarf palms. Little white puffs dotted the ground, transient as a photographer’s magnesium flare. The shots merged into a continuous crackling noise which grew steadily. The Tercio, in the centre, carried the assault against the summit where, in the middle of a bare, stony clearing, stood the *kabila*, surrounded by a stone wall. Once more, shells fell within the enclosure. The machine-guns sounded like motor-cycles accelerating on many distant roads.

At ten o’clock, we sappers were given the order to advance.

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We were to fortify the hill which the Legion had just stormed. It was to be a position big enough to hold a whole company as well as a battery of field guns, protected by a circle of ten thousand sandbags. When we reached the edge of the summit, we were ordered to lie flat on the ground, load our rifles and scatter. A staff-captain came and went. He held a whispered conversation with our commander and galloped away to the hill-top, only to reappear shortly afterwards. Then we were ordered to advance again. And we advanced, slowly; we reached the edge of the clearing and cautiously raised our heads. Behind every stone, every ripple on the bare ground there was a legionary, firing his rifle. Now and then one of them started to rise and collapsed. A few tried to find better shelter by going backwards. It was a slow, individual retreat, but the legionaries were retreating. Again and again, another of them came closer to us as we crouched motionless, fascinated, behind the evergreen oaks. The stone parapet of the *kabila* was ablaze, a single firing line. The bullets whistled over our heads while we clung to the ground, straining to see.

In the middle of the clearing was a rider on horseback, dashing to and fro; at his side ran a tiny figure: Millan Astray with his bugler. There was a momentary lull in the fighting. The horse stopped, the horseman stood upright in his stirrups:

‘To me the Legion! Fix bayonets!’

He raised an arm stained with blood.

The men jumped the stone parapet in clusters.

The handling of explosives was one of my specialities. That afternoon they came to fetch me. A sergeant of the Legion came together with one of our officers. They explained the case to me. They were just burying the dead. A legionary had bayoneted a Moor and stabbed him through the chest, but with such barbaric force that the rifle had penetrated up to the bolt. It was impossible to pull out the weapon except by sawing the corpse in two. But the rifle was still fit for use. So they had thought of introducing explosive into the rifle and blowing it up.

I organized the explosion as best I could. I poured a few percussion-caps of mercury fulminate, such as we used for blowing up bore-holes in the quarry, down the rifle barrel, which stuck out

from the Moor's back. His was a skeleton-like body, wrapped in a torn grey burnous soaked with blood.

The mulatto, his lips still inflamed, his hands idle, watched me with curiosity while I dropped the little golden percussion-caps with much care into the barrel. He stood back when I gave the order. I set fire to the fuse in the rifle-mouth and ran away. The Moor's stomach burst open.

The mulatto laughed like an animal, with a twist to the lip that still smarted.

Back in my tent, I drank a large glass of brandy and stopped myself from vomiting.

Dusk came. On the far side of the mountain, at the bottom of a ravine, the Moors had stopped firing. There was a great silence in the fields. Only in our position the fire crackled on through the din of the victors as they pitched their tents, tied up their horses, sang, complained of their wounds, and shouted orders at each other.

A voice rose from the depth of the ravine, intoning the evening prayer. I saw the distant, earth-coloured figures of the Moors making their salaams to the sound of the savage, wailing psalmody, their rifles at their sides. At the foot of the shadowy mountains the mist began to rise, enveloping the praying figures. Only the chant rose above the swirl of the fog, as though the fog itself were singing. Outside the parapet, on the stony clearing, lay a dead Moor who had fallen face downwards, black arms flung wide, hands clenched, black desiccated legs apart. The big tuft of hair on his shaven head fluttered in the blue night wind.

(II) UNAMUNO'S LAST LECTURE

by *LUIS PORTILLO*

'Unamuno died suddenly, as one who dies in war. Against whom? Perhaps against himself; and also, although many may not believe it, against the men who sold Spain and betrayed his people. Against the people itself? I have never believed that and never shall believe it.'—Antonio Machado, 'Notas de Actualidad', in the magazine *Madrid*, Valencia, February 1937.

'Some maintained, during those frantic days, their independence of mind. From the human point of view, it is a consolation; from the Spanish point of view, a hope.'—Manuel Azana, Prologue to *La Velada en Benicarlo*, Paris, May 1939.

THE Ceremonial Hall in the University of Salamanca is a spacious chamber, used only on formal occasions, solemn, austere, the walls hung with tapestries. Through the huge windows enters a shimmering flood of iridescent light which deepens the amber glow of the century-old plinth stones.

This was the setting.

The play was enacted on the 12th October 1936, when Spanish Fascism was in its first triumphant stage. The morning was half spent. The patriotic festival of the Hispanic Race was being celebrated.

There they were on the presidential dais: the purple calotte, the amethyst ring and the flashing pectoral cross of the Most Illustrious Doctor Plá y Daniel, Bishop of the Diocese; the lack-lustre robes of the Magistrates; the profuse glitter of military gold braid side by side with the crosses and medals exhibited on presumptuously bulging chests; the morning coat, set off by black satin lapels, of His Excellency the Civil Governor of the Province; and all these surrounded—was it to honour or to overwhelm?—the man whose pride in his incorruptible Spanish conscience was steadfast and straight: Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo, the Rector.

From the front wall, the allegorical picture of the Republic had gone, and there shone from under a canopy the Caudillo's effigy in plump insolence. To the left and right, on crimson-covered divans, the silk of the doctors' gowns and their mortar-boards with gay tassels in red, yellow, light blue and dark blue, symbolizing Law, Medicine, Letters and Science.

A few ladies were scattered among the learned men; in a

prominent place, Doña Carmen Polo de Franco, the distinguished spouse of the Man of Providence.

From a packed audience which faced the dais of the elect, with its protective balustrade of dark polished wood, there rose the confused murmur of expectancy. At the far end of the long hall glinted the rounded brasses of a military band, ready to play the obligatory hymns.

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The ceremony began. Don Miguel opened it with the ritual formula, spoken in that unforgettable voice of his, thin and clear. Then Don Francisco Maldonado stepped on to the platform, short, fat, Professor of Literature and Salamanca land-owner. With affected, baroque diction and vast erudition, he delivered a colourless and circumstantial address. At the end, he expressed his hope for a better future, with kindly and sincere emotion. He descended the steps among cheers and applause, bowed to the dais and returned to his seat. He was followed on the speaker's platform by Don José Maria Ramos Loscertales of Saragossa, tall and lean, with fluid gestures, flashing eyes, sober and precise of speech, his sensitive face in perpetual motion, expressing a subtle and enigmatic irony. He spoke of the mortal struggle raging at the time—yet another circumstantial speech. Its thesis: the energies of Spain at white-heat in a crucible of passion—and like gold from the crucible, Spain would emerge in the end, purified and without stain, in her true colours which rejected the taints artificially imposed on her. Clamorous ovation.

And then rose General Millan Astray. With ostentatious humility, he preferred to speak from his own place. His appearance was impressive. The General is thin, of an emaciation which pretends to slimness. He has lost one eye and one arm. His face and his body bear the indelible tattoo of horrible scars. These savage mutilations and gashes evoke a sinister personality; his angry and rancorous bearing kills any compassion his mutilations might have inspired.

He has been the organizer of the *Tercio*, the Spanish Foreign Legion for operations in Africa; he had been the creator of an iron, inexorable discipline to which the reckless fugitives from other social discipline submitted of their own free will. He had gained those wounds which to many seemed glorious, to some

ever-exploited, and to all horribly impressive, in those fantastic Moroccan campaigns which had been Spain's bitter nightmare under the regretted ægis of King Alfonso XIII, called 'The African' in his day. Yet the unquestionable nimbus which surrounded the figure of the General was due to the gruesome originality, to the mysterious paradox of his battlecry: *Viva la Muerte!*—'Long live Death!'

Barely had Millan Astray risen to his feet when his strident voice rang out, as though bursting from that heroic chest bedizened with a galaxy of crosses, the testimonials and rewards of gallantry.

First of all he said that more than one-half of all Spaniards were criminals, guilty of armed rebellion and high treason. To remove any ambiguity, he went on to explain that by these rebels and traitors he meant the citizens who were loyal to the Government.

In a sudden flash of intuition, a member of the audience was inspired so as to grasp the faultless logic of a slogan which common minds had thought the product of an epileptic brain. With fervour, he shouted:

'*Viva, viva la Muerte!*'—'Long live Death!'

Impervious, the General continued his fiery speech:

'Catalonia and the Basque country—the Basque country and Catalonia—are two cancers in the body of the nation. Fascism, which is Spain's health-bringer, will know how to exterminate them both, cutting into the live, healthy flesh like a resolute surgeon free from false sentimentality. And since the healthy flesh is the soil, the diseased flesh the people who dwell on it. Fascism and the Army will eradicate the people and restore the soil to the sacred national realm. . . .'

He made a pause and cast a despotic glance over the audience. And he saw that he held them in thrall, hypnotized to a man. Never had any of his harangues so subjugated the will of his listeners. Obviously, he was in his element. . . . He had conquered the University! And carried away himself, he continued, blind to the subtle and withering smile of disdain on the lips of the Rector.

'Every Socialist, every Republican, every one of them without exception—and needless to say every Communist—is a rebel against the National Government which will very soon be recognized by the totalitarian States who are aiding us, in spite of France—democratic France—and perfidious England.'

'And then, or even sooner, when Franco wants it, and with the help of the gallant Moors who, though they wrecked my body only yesterday, to-day deserve the gratitude of my soul, for they are fighting for Spain against the Spaniards. . . . I mean, the bad Spaniards . . . because they are giving their lives in defence of Spain's sacred religion, as is proved by their attending field mass, escorting the Caudillo and pinning holy medallions and Sacred Hearts to their burnous. . . .'

The General lost himself in the maze of his own vehement outburst. He hesitated, irritated and defiant at the same time. In these straits, an enthusiastic Fascist came to his rescue and shouted:

'*Arriba España!*'

The crowd bowed their heads in resignation. The man went on, undaunted:

'Spain!'¹

Mechanically, the crowd responded: 'One!'

'Spain!' he repeated.

'Great!' chorused the obedient public.

'Spain!' the Blue Shirt insisted, implacably.

'Free!' they all replied, cowed.

There was an obvious lack of warmth and listlessness in these artificially produced responses. Several Blue Shirts rose to their feet as though pushed by invisible springs, and raised their right arms stiffly in the Roman salute. And they hailed the sepia-coloured photograph on the front wall:

'Franco!'

The public rose reluctantly and chanted parrot-like:

'Franco! Franco! Franco!'

But Franco's image did not stir. Neither did the Rector.

Don Miguel did not rise to his feet. And the public fell silent and sat down again.

All eyes were fastened in tense anxiety on the noble head, on the pale, serene brow framed by snow-white hair. The uncertain expression of his eyes was hidden by the glitter of his spectacles.

Between the fine curve of his nose and the silver of his Quixote-like beard, his mouth was twisted in a bitter grimace of undisguised contempt. People began to grow uneasy. A few suddenly

¹ *España Una, Grande y Libre*—'Spain One, Great and Free'—is the obligatory Falangist slogan which is converted on all solemn occasions into chorused responses to a leading voice, as in the following scene.

felt a recrudescence of their old rancorous abhorrence. Some admired the serene fearlessness of the Master and feared for his safety. The majority were gripped by the voluptuous thrill of imminent tragedy.

At last, Don Miguel rose slowly. The silence was an enormous void. Into this void, Don Miguel began to pour the stream of his speech, as though savouring each measured word. This is the essence of what he said:

‘All of you are hanging on my words. You all know me, and are aware that I am unable to remain silent. I have not learnt to do so in seventy-three years of my life. And now I do not wish to learn it any more. At times, to be silent is to lie. For silence can be interpreted as acquiescence. I could not survive a divorce between my conscience and my word, always well-mated partners.

‘I will be brief. Truth is most true when naked, free of embellishments and verbiage.

‘I want to comment on the speech—to give it that name—of General Millan Astray who is here among us.’

The General stiffened provocatively.

‘Let us waive the personal affront implied in the sudden outburst of vituperation against Basques and Catalans in general. I was born in Bilbao, in the midst of the bombardments of the Second Carlist War. Later, I wedded myself to this city of Salamanca which I love deeply, yet never forgetting my native town. The Bishop, whether he likes it or not, is a Catalan from Barcelona.’

He made a pause. Faces had grown pale. The short silence was tense and dramatic. Expectation neared its peak.

‘Just now, I heard a necrophilous and senseless cry: “Long live Death!” To me it sounds the equivalent of *Muera la Vida!*—“To Death with Life!” And I, who have spent my life shaping paradoxes which aroused the uncomprehending anger of the others, I must tell you, as an expert authority, that this outlandish paradox is repellent to me. Since it was proclaimed in homage to the last speaker, I can only explain it to myself by supposing that it was addressed to him, though in an excessively strange and tortuous form, as a testimonial to his being himself a symbol of death.

‘And now, another matter. General Millan Astray is a cripple. Let it be said without any slighting undertone. He is a war invalid. So was Cervantes. But extremes do not make the rule:

they escape it. Unfortunately, there are all too many cripples in Spain now. And soon, there will be even more of them if God does not come to our aid. It pains me to think that General Millan Astray should dictate the pattern of mass-psychology.

‘That would be appalling. A cripple who lacks the spiritual greatness of a Cervantes—a man, not a superman, virile and complete, in spite of his mutilations—a cripple, I said, who lacks that loftiness of mind, is wont to seek ominous relief in seeing mutilation around him.’

His words rang out crystal clear. The heavy silence gave them resonance.

‘General Millan Astray is not one of the select minds, even though he is unpopular, or rather, for that very reason. Because he is unpopular. General Millan Astray would like to create Spain anew—a negative creation—in his own image and likeness. And for that reason he wishes to see Spain crippled, as he unwittingly made clear.’

At this point General Millan Astray could stand it no longer and shouted wildly:

‘*Muera la Inteligencial!*’—“To death with Intelligence!”

‘No, long live intelligence! To death with bad intellectuals!’ corrected Don José Maria Pemán, a journalist from Cadiz. A few voices seconded him, many hands were clenched to check an imprudent impulse to applaud the aged Rector. The Blue Shirts felt tempted to become violent, true to totalitarian procedure. But a most unusual realization of their numerical inferiority strangled this impulse at birth. Arguments flared up round the names of academicians who had disappeared or been shot. Irritated ‘sh’s’ came from various sides. Some gowned figures had gathered round Don Miguel, some Blue Shirts round their vilified hero.

At last the clamour died down like the sound of surf on the beach, and the groups dispersed. Don Miguel again became visible to the assembly, very erect, his arms folded and his gaze fixed straight ahead, like the statue of a stoic. Once more his word dominated the hall.

‘This is the temple of intellect. And I am its high priest. It is you who are profaning its sacred precincts.

‘I have always, whatever the proverb may say, been a prophet in my own land. You will win, but you will not convince. You

will win, because you possess more than enough brute force, but you will not convince, because to convince means to persuade. And in order to persuade you would need what you lack—reason and right in the struggle. I consider it futile to exhort you to think of Spain. I have finished.'

The controversies flamed up again, interrupted by sudden waves of unanimous silence.

Then Don Esteban Madruga, Professor of Common Law, a straightforward and truly good man, took Don Miguel by the arm, offered his other arm to Doña Carmen Polo de Franco, and led them out of the room. Unamuno walked with perfect dignity, pale and calm. Franco's wife was so stunned that she walked like an automaton.

The Junta in Burgos was consulted. Franco's orders came: they were inexorable. If the offence was considered grave enough, the Rector of Salamanca was to be executed without delay. The offence was indeed considered to be so, but somebody who was better advised realized that such an act would fatally injure the prestige of the nascent 'Movement of Salvation'. It was therefore never carried out.

Don Miguel retired to his home. His house was kept surrounded by the police.

And shortly afterwards, thus guarded, Miguel de Unamuno died suddenly on the last day of 1936, the victim of a stroke of the brain, achieving lasting peace.

RAYMOND MORTIMER

INTRODUCTION TO BALZAC

BALZAC is now rarely mentioned in this country, and, I fancy, not much more frequently perused. Stendhal commands the unstinted admiration of modern novelists and critics to the exclusion of his great contemporary. But acutely as I admire Stendhal, I believe Balzac to be a far greater writer, just as I believe Shakespeare to be a far greater writer than Dryden; and I am a little puzzled that Balzac should be thus neglected. I can understand that his vulgarity of thought, feeling and style should offend those who rate elegance as the highest of æsthetic qualities. But such extreme niceness of palate has always been exceptional, and is no longer even fashionable. Indeed I think that the reaction against shapelessness, polish and literary dandyism has already been pushed to excess. Why, then, is Balzac still under a shadow? In recommending him I could base myself upon an infallible authority: Karl Marx admired Balzac so intensely that he contemplated writing a book about him.

Though many eminent nineteenth-century critics discussed Balzac, their conclusions were vitiated by a lack of historical perspective. Except the great English Balzacian, Saintsbury, they usually treated the *Comédie Humaine* as a mirror, unprecedented in its fidelity, of human society. This was indeed Balzac's own opinion. Scott had enlarged the scope of the novel by the elaboration with which he set the stage for his characters: basing himself explicitly on this example, Balzac introduced into the novel of contemporary life a far greater wealth of those details which previous novelists had thought too commonplace or too vulgar to be interesting. His avowed purpose was to describe men as the naturalist describes animals. He is therefore treated by historians as the originator of the realistic novel, the acknowledged father of Zola and the Goncourts. But now that a hundred and twelve years have passed since the name of Honoré de Balzac first appeared on a title-page, he takes his place, I suggest, as essentially

a romantic genius, the most imaginative of the prose-writers produced by the Romantic Movement. Born eleven years after Byron and three years before Hugo, Balzac began by writing pseudonymous novels in the style of Monk Lewis and Mrs. Radcliffe. But in the first book that he signed with his own name, *Le Dernier Chouan*, Scott and Fenimore Cooper had become his models. Soon he set himself to the task of describing the whole elaborate society of contemporary France, every class and every province with their peculiarities, and the social developments from the Revolution to the end of the July Monarchy. Exhausted by his prodigious labours, he died at the age of fifty-one, before he had completed his carefully comprehensive plan. The series to be devoted to military life was hardly begun; and furthermore there are few teachers, children or peasants in the *Comédie Humaine*. Balzac is most convincing when he describes notaries, doctors, journalists, shopkeepers, commercial travellers, usurers and other business-men—in fact the bourgeoisie that he watched expanding with such exuberance its powers and pretensions. He is no less fond of depicting grandees, fashionable tarts and criminals; but here he lets his fancy rip, almost untrammelled by observation. His plots are as extravagant as his characters, and Ouida was no less his heir than Zola. Even his bourgeois are painted far larger than life-size—how much larger you can judge by comparing any of Balzac's books about them with *L'Education Sentimentale*. Take for instance *L'Illustre Gaudissart*, a short story describing a practical joke played by the Vouvrillons upon a commercial traveller from Paris. The commercial traveller is carved on a gigantic scale, like the cherubs ten foot high in St. Peter's. He is 'one of the most curious productions of the modern world'.

Ce pyrophore humain est un savant ignorant, un mystificateur mystifié, un prêtre incrédule qui n'en parle que mieux de ses mystères et de ses dogmes. Curieuse figure! Cet homme a tout vu, il sait tout, il connaît tout le monde. . . .

He is compared to an actor, a human machine, a hawk, a stag, and a hot-water tap.

Combien ne faut-il pas à un tel homme de qualités supérieures! Trouverez-vous, dans un pays, beaucoup de ces diplomates de bas étage, de ces profonds négociateurs parlant au nom des calicots, du bijou, de la draperie, des vins, et souvent plus habiles que les

ambassadeurs, qui la plupart, n'ont que les formes: Personne en France ne se doute de l'incroyable puissance incessamment déployée par les Voyageurs, ces intrepides affronteurs de négations qui, dans la dernière bourgade, représentent le génie de la civilisation et les inventions parisiennes aux prises avec le bon sens, l'ignorance ou la routine des provinces.

And so on, till Gaudissart swells into a Prometheus, without ceasing to be comic. The supreme triumph of such aggrandisement is le Père Goriot. The celebrated story named after him has often been compared with *King Lear*. And re-reading it the other day I indeed felt that no writer except Shakespeare and Balzac ever rose to such an intense realization of human passion.

Mes filles, c'était mon vice à moi; elles étaient mes maîtresses, enfin tout. . . . Envoyez les chercher par la gendarmerie de force! La justice est pour moi, tout est pour moi. La nature, le Code civil. Je proteste! La patrie périra si les pères sont foulés aux pieds. . . . Il y a un Dieu dans les cieux, il nous venge malgré nous, nous autres pères. . . . La loi veut qu'on vienne voir mourir son père, la loi est pour moi. Puis ça ne coutera qu'une course. Je la payerai. Ecrivez-leur que j'ai des millions à leur laisser! Parole d'honneur. J'irai faire des pâtes d'Italie à Odessa. . . . Je veux mes filles! Je les ai faites, elles sont à moi! . . . Pas de mariages! C'est ce qui nous enlève nos filles. . . .

It is characteristic of Balzac that there is no Cordelia to contrast with the Regan of Mme. de Restaud and the Goneril of Mme. de Nucingen; and that their monstrous behaviour could not weaken their father's passion. It is still more characteristic that his Lear is not a king but a retired manufacturer of vermicelli.

The unsurpassed vehemence of Balzac's imagination is beyond a critic's power to analyse. But it is easy to perceive one of the methods by which he projected into his novels so effectively the colossal creatures of his invention. He based his view of human nature upon a false analogy from Buffon's zoology:

La société ne fait-elle pas de l'homme, suivant les milieux où son action se déploie, autant d'hommes différents qu'il y a de variétés en zoologie? Les différences entre un soldat, un ouvrier, un administrateur, un avocat, un oisif, un savant, un homme d'Etat, un commerçant, un marin, un poète, un pauvre, un prêtre, sont, quoique plus difficiles à saisir, aussi considérables que celles qui distinguent le bœuf, le lion, l'âne, le corbeau, le requin, le veau marin, la brebis, etc. Il a donc existé, il existera donc de tout temps, des espèces sociales comme il y a des espèces zoologiques. Si Buffon a fait un magnifique ouvrage en

essayant de représenter dans un livre l'ensemble de la zoologie, n'y avait-il pas une Œuvre de ce genre à faire pour la Société?

This is the theory behind the *Comédie Humaine*: and like so many of Balzac's theories it is patent nonsense. But it rationalizes his practice of attributing to the member of these various 'species' entire subservience to ruling passions.

Each vital humour which should feed the whole
 Soon flows to this in body and in soul . . .
 Imagination plies her dangerous art
 And pours it all upon the peccant part.
 Nature its mother, talent is its nurse,
 Wit, spirit, faculties, but make it worse;
 Reason itself but gives it edge and power,
 As heaven's bless'd beam turns vinegar more sour.

The respectable antiquity of this theory of the ruling passion cannot blind us to its falsity. If indeed there be men and women dominated by a single purpose, I for one have never met them; and it is one of the superiorities that Shakespeare enjoys over a Jonson and a Molière that he did not accept, at least in his principal characters, this convenient delusion. One can maintain that Tolstoy, for the same reason, is a greater novelist than Balzac: he is incomparably more realistic—his imagination, moreover, is finely poetic, and therefore superior in quality to Balzac's. But just how useful this convention can be you may tell from the glorious effects Balzac drew from it. The single-mindedness with which his characters pursue their purposes gives them a superhuman vitality, obliging us to suspend disbelief in what is really incredible. The titanic shapes that animate with their violent chiaroscuro the Scuola di San Rocco, the elongated phantoms that writhe and flicker above the altars of Toledo, are no less foreign to our experience of the human body than are Balzac's monomaniacs to our experience of the human heart. Because he was the first novelist (at any rate in France) to describe the humblest details of furniture, clothing, physique, disease, and income, Balzac has been compared with the painters of the Dutch School. To find his parallel, we should look rather to Tintoret and El Greco.

I am not denying his prodigious skill in *genre* painting. The settings in which he places his monsters are elaborate to the point sometimes of tedium. His belief in the theories of Lavater

encouraged him to expatiate on the temperamental significance of thin noses, deep-set eyes and protuberant lips: a plump chin shows a woman to be amorously exacting, front teeth that cross mark their owner as a potential murderer. Similarly in his view a house, an armchair, or a suit of clothes possesses a physiognomy expressive of its occupant. In describing his various species of human being, he revels in cataloguing the particularities of their habitats. He anticipated Taine, indeed, in his sense of the moulding power of environment. In one of his silliest stories, *Facino Cane*, he presents himself to us mixing, ill-clad, with workmen, and watching their quarrels.

Chez moi, l'observation était déjà devenue intuitive, elle pénétrait l'âme, sans négliger le corps; ou plutot elle saisissait si bien les détails extérieurs, qu'elle allait sur le champ au delà; elle me donnait la faculté de vivre de la vie de l'individu sur laquelle elle s'exerçait, en me permettant de me substituer à lui. . . .

One may be a little sceptical about these expeditions in the style of Haroun al Raschid and Mr. Tom Harrison, and at least during the seventeen years in which the *Comédie Humaine* was produced he was too busy writing to have much time for observation. As Bourget puts it, 'Balzac n'a pas eu le temps de vivre'. At the same time there is a self-revelation in Raphael de Valentin's cry: 'Je veux vivre avec excès'. Balzac attained this ambition—vicariously. With his romantic imagination he created a world complete with figures that are usually either demoniac or angelic, a world that is a distortion rather than a reflection of actuality, but none the less crammed with microscopic detail. Eugène de Rastignac and the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse are not the less enjoyable because one cannot believe there was ever anyone resembling them. In his own house Balzac scribbled on the naked plaster 'Here is a veneer of Parian Marble', and 'Here is a ceiling painted by Delacroix'; and even when he accumulated real possessions—he was a fanatical collector—the Sebastiano, the Hobbema, the Dürer that he so proudly exhibited to his friends were mere daubs. He lived from his imagination, just as he wrote from it.

The supreme merit of the *Comédie Humaine* is that it is exciting. We have come to look in novels chiefly for sensibility or shapeliness or style. So many thousands of bad novelists have sought solely (and vainly) to be exciting, that such an aim now appears

intrinsically low. Thus those recent novelists who have succeeded in this aim—Stevenson, for instance, and Kipling and Somerset Maugham, are unfashionable with cognoscenti. The neglect of Balzac may come largely from the same cause; and if one says he was the greatest story-teller that has yet appeared, the fact may be admitted, but the interest aroused thereby will be languid. Only preparatory schoolboys and stockbrokers, it is assumed, are so unsophisticated as to enjoy what, with an ironic shudder, is called 'a good yarn'. (If, however, the yarn concerns the detection of a murderer or the bestiality of gangsters, it is mysteriously approved by the nicest admirers of Flaubert and Henry James.) In the art of narrative Balzac is incomparable for inventiveness, vitality and persuasiveness. He mesmerizes us into accepting what is least plausible, by the force of his own belief in it. A remark of his is justly famous: his friend and confidant, Jules Sandeau, having talked for some while about an ill sister, 'Revenons à la réalité', said Balzac, 'Qui va épouser Eugénie Grandet?' Similarly his dying words were 'Only Bianchon can save me now!' To him Dr. Bianchon and the Grandets were more real than the persons he knew, the *Princesse de Cadignan* and *La Torpille* more irresistible than the women with whom he was in love. The characters in the *Comédie Humaine*, of whom there must be three thousand, lived for their creator with the force of an hallucination. The only novelist who has constructed a comparable world is Proust, whose scope is much narrower. (Jules Romains has succeeded in presenting an absorbing and far more plausible picture of a whole society, but how papery his characters are by the side of either Proust's or Balzac's.) I suspect that Balzac's total output of words exceeds that of Scott, Trollope or Dickens, and I am certain that no other writer has produced so much good work in so short a time, for the whole of the *Comédie Humaine* (and the *Contes Drôlatiques* as well) was written in seventeen years. Parts of it I have failed to read, *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées*, *Le Médecin de Campagne*, *Les Petits Bourgeois*; others I shall never again read through, *César Birotteau*, for instance, and *Ursule Mirouet*, because their great merits do not, for me, outweigh the boredom caused by the expatiations respectively upon bankruptcy-law and spiritualism. I do not care for any of the mystical excursions classified as 'Études Philosophiques', *Jésus Christ en Flandres*, *Melmoth Réconcilié*, or even the brilliant, self-revealing, *Peau de Chagrin*.

Here the character-drawing is flimsy; moreover such subjects demand a poetic imagination, and Balzac's was essentially dramatic. On the other hand I do not mind his wildest improbabilities, so long as he avoids the supernatural. I like the *Histoire des Treize*, which contains a description of the Paris proletariat worthy of Zola, but is a thriller as wild as anything by Sapper or Eugène Sue. Honorine living luxuriously at her husband's expense can believe that she is earning her own living; Esther Gobseck can be removed from a brothel to become an exemplary pupil in a convent-school; the half-starved Baron de Bourlac can spend half his exiguous earnings on flowers to persuade his daughter that he still is rich; Vautrin can be Vautrin; and I not only accept but enjoy. My favourites among the novels are *La Rabouilleuse*, *La Cousine Bette*, *Les Illusions Perdues*, *Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes*, *La Muse du Département*, and of course *Le Père Goriot*. There are at least twenty shorter works that are no less masterly, such as *Le Curé de Tours*, *La Vieille Fille*, *Gobseck*, and *Honorine*. To those who have read no Balzac I think I should recommend *La Rabouilleuse* (also known as *Un Ménage de Garçon*), which displays magnificently the author's power with few of his foibles. But each book (except some of the *Etudes Philosophiques*) enriches the impression made by the others with which it has characters in common—some personages appear in fifteen or twenty different books. Consequently one's enjoyment is cumulative. There is no particular order in which the novels should be read, but as you proceed through them, you have the pleasure of finding the protagonists of volumes you have read, reappearing as secondary characters in the volume you are reading. No single book can begin to give the measure of Balzac, because it was his genius to create a world.

All his life Balzac remained a provincial, agog at the luxury and ostentatious vice of 'cette grande courtisane', 'le plus délicieux des monstres', Paris. He was intoxicated by the modern: he was proud to be living in an age of unprecedented cynicism, display and depravity. The Rome of the Borgias could not hold a candle to the Paris of poor, clever, umbrella-carrying Louis-Philippe. He is always anxious to show off as a man of the world, and he always fails in this, because of his naïf astonishment at the goings on that he describes. (One is reminded of Arnold Bennett.) After meeting duchesses, he managed still to think

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them different from other people. But his gusto is rewarding. *Les Comédiens sans le savoir*, for instance, hardly amounts to a story, but it is the liveliest account of a provincial's amazement at *le dernier cri* in the Paris of 1845, the tenor who earns 100,000 francs a season, the hatter who gives himself the airs of a creative artist, the unbridled luxury of a fashionable barber-shop. How Balzac must have enjoyed writing this! Continually you come upon such remarks as this about the conversation of statesmen, 'Il n'est pas de milieu pour eux, ou ils sont lourds ou ils sont sublimes'. Such nonsense is revealing—what it means of course is 'Il n'est pas de milieu pour moi'. No less ingenuous than his pose as a man of the world is his passion for parading as an encyclopædia of natural science and the arts. Apropos of anything or nothing we are treated to disquisitions on every conceivable subject. 'One learns how to play Boston whist and a card game called Loo, how to cure apoplexy, how to catch otters, how to make one's hair grow, how to predetermine the sex of children, how to disinherit illegitimate children, how to make canals, how to distinguish a disease called Polish plica'.¹ He can never resist making irrelevant, ostentatious and inaccurate comments like that upon Michelangelo's sculpture, 'Cette curieuse disposition du sein dans les figures du Jour et la Nuit, que tant de critiques trouvent exagérée, mais qui est particulière aux femmes de la Ligurie.' Similarly the toad is the summary of all creation because its marriage lasts longest, and Lancashire is defined as a district where women die of love. The self-confidence with which he lavishes these extravagant and apparently purposeless remarks was calculated to stun the reader into acquiescence. At the same time Balzac believed in his own nonsense, not only in the phrenology and the magnetism, but in the fabulous virtues and vices he invented. He was indeed the most vigorously imaginative of all the romantic authors, for whereas the others usually had to seek their dream-world in distant times and places, mediæval Germany, the Spain of the Inquisition, among the Moors or the Iroquois, Balzac possessed the force to find in contemporary France all the necessary flamboyance of colour and violence of chiaroscuro, and to impose his vision upon the reader's scepticism. Philippe Bridau is hardly more probable than

¹ I quote from Mr. Arthur Marshall's dazzling essay which appeared in *Humaniora* of June 1937.

the characters in Webster or Ford, but we accept him as if he were a character in Shakespeare. Beside Balzac, all other novelists seem pale—except Dickens, who seems callow. He imposed himself so convincingly upon his contemporaries that clubs were formed whose members assumed the names, and the conduct, of his characters—a pastime resulting in some reprehensible behaviour. To-day we may be less completely at the mercy of his mesmeric passes, and often one scribbles in the margin an exclamation-mark, meaning 'How like Balzac!'; but it is a token of his greatness that we come to delight even in his absurdities, because they are so characteristic.

Fervent as is my devotion to Balzac, he is not one of those favourite authors, like Boswell, Miss Austen and Proust, to whose company I resort when tired or depressed; and I never look forward to starting a novel of his, though I delight in it when I have taken the plunge. The reason for this is chiefly his style. In the portraits we have of him he looks like the fat, truculent wife of a butcher, and the language he uses is no less insensitive and bloated than his appearance. His clumsiness often sinks into glaring solecisms, his floridity into parvenu pretentiousness, and when he tries to be poetical, he is usually comic. Whereas almost all the other great writers of France are distinguished by a good breeding that makes it a delight to frequent them, Balzac always talks at the top of his voice. No *cliché* is too common for him, no jargon too rebarbative; he is rich in graphic images and epigrams, but never offers us a beautiful cadence. He seizes you by the button-hole, and pokes his sweaty face into yours—Zola and Dickens are the only writers of genius that are comparable in vulgarity. But just as one can gradually cease to notice a smell, so the reader, fascinated by the matter, comes to disregard the bad manners. Balzac took infinite pains, rewriting on his proofs as often as twelve times. This seems astonishing, but the consequence is that in his best books, except occasionally in descriptions of fine sentiments or scenery, and more frequently in details of finance, he succeeds completely in what was his first object, holding the reader's attention. He is like an actor whose dramatic power gradually makes us forget his obesity, or a painter whose bad drawing is swallowed by the splendour of his colour. Indeed so vivid are Balzac's results that one may feel unreasonable in complaining of his methods. A more disciplined and limpid style

would probably fail to carry so irresistible a sense of life. Balzac impresses us like a force of Nature, a sunset or a Niagara, to which we surrender, without seeking to apply æsthetic standards.

Although he wrote often for sixteen hours at a stretch, drugging himself with coffee, while at his door printers' devils waited for their sheets and creditors for their money, Balzac never, I think, was reduced to mechanical pot-boiling. His inventiveness was inexhaustible; when my interest flags, this is not because he is writing without conviction. On the contrary, it is because he is carried away by his obsession with some subject irrelevant to the narrative, some familiar spavined hobby-horse like the evil effects of the Code Napoléon or the Ecole Polytechnique. I do not believe that Balzac in his most hard-pressed moments ever wrote a sentence that he did not himself find interesting; and his style, however reproachable, is the result of this impetus. Foaming, sparkling, hasty, scummy, and opaque, it is a boulder-encumbered, whirlpool-forming torrent into which you hesitate to plunge; but, once in, you are swept irresistibly along.

Balzac's preoccupation with money produced some marvellous results, particularly the portrait-gallery of misers. (But the intending catechumen should be warned not to begin, as so many have done, with *Eugénie Grandet*, which is not, I think, one of Balzac's most exhilarating books.) Under Louis Philippe the power of money was revealed more undisguisedly than it had been since the fifth century. Balzac was naturally equipped to describe this: he personally adored the luxury that money could provide, and his life was an uninterrupted struggle with creditors. Thus he became increasingly obsessed by the dramatic value of money as a symbol of power. Covetousness is the ruling passion that he depicts with most frequency and verve. This doubtless is why Marx thought him so penetrating, and why some of us think him so blinkered. We live, as Balzac did, in a society that encourages the love of money by irrationally and indeed suicidally over-rewarding the rich. Yet men are more usually governed, I believe, by pleasure, affection, laziness and above all by vanity and self-respect than by love of money. I cannot think that it was otherwise in Balzac's day. He offers us, it is true, a number of characters to whom money and power are unimportant, but to these he invariably attaches the epithet 'sublime'—by which he means 'eccentric' or 'irrational'. He professes to admire them, but

it is clear that he has no fellow-feeling with them, and that his conventional respect is qualified by instinctive contempt.

Consequently—and this is in my eyes Balzac's most irritating fault—the world of his imagination is peopled by two classes, clever knaves and virtuous fools. In almost every one of his novels we have to watch, with growing impatience, the good falling a prey most unconvincingly, to the obvious machinations of the wicked. Sometimes one can hardly bear to go on with the story: at the end of *Les Illusions Perdues*, for instance, it is only with a great effort that I can continue to read of the victimization of the Séchards by the Cointets. Balzac always seems to wish vindictively to strip goodness of its prestige by coupling it with blindness and silliness. For he is not a genuine misanthrope, like Swift or Proust. He does indeed think most men are evil, but he does not hate them in consequence. Rather does he admire them, as we admire the totems of the English-speaking peoples, the lion and the eagle, for their ferocity. Nothing excites his gusto more than the relentlessness of a great man, nothing except the heartlessness and skill in dissimulation of a great lady. He is a worshipper of power, but whereas his fellow-idolater, Carlyle, with a typically English—or would his compatriots prefer me to say typically Scottish?—hypocrisy, pretends that lovers of power are good men, Balzac positively gloats over their wickedness. When Rastignac exclaims 'Pauvre Bianchon, il ne sera jamais qu'un honnête homme!' he reveals not only his own character, but his creator's basic philosophy.

This taste for villains is part of the regular Romantic equipment. In Balzac it is particularly exasperating because it expresses itself in a picture of life that prides itself on truthfulness. The wicked in the real world are not more intelligent than the good—they are as a rule noticeably stupider. Most criminals are subnormal, and even successful business men are often comically foolish, like opera-singers, except at their own specialized job—look at Mr. Ford. I do not doubt that there are men and women who come to grief, as is the rule with so many of Balzac's characters, through their goodness, but I believe these to be very rare. On the other hand I have known several uncommonly gifted persons who have been failures for one reason only—their inability to behave with common decency. Entire self-centredness and lack of scruple may pay in Wall Street—they certainly do not pay in

most departments of life. The anti-social man may indeed end as a millionaire, but he is more likely to end segregated, like a rogue elephant, or consigned in the company of other failures to the rubbish heap of a common lodging-house. Balzac, however, was almost as consistent in rewarding wickedness as are the authors of novelettes in rewarding virtue.

Balzac's belief that most men are actuated only by low motives made him politically an absolutist; and, though an unbeliever, a supporter of the Catholic Church. Only the fear of the jail or of the eternal flames, he thought, could preserve a society from the evil passions of the individuals of which it was composed. The *Comédie Humaine* brims with considerations upon politics and religion as well as upon science and the arts. As often as not these are silly; but the scope of the author's lively if superficial mind immensely reinforces the interest of his books. He is by nature, one might say by nationality, a philosopher, interested in detecting the causes of behaviour, and establishing general laws. Montaigne, Pascal, La Fontaine, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, Voltaire, Chateaubriand, Stendhal—almost all the great French writers have observed the particular in order to uncover the universal. In painting similarly the French School combines a rendering of *choses vues* with a constant concern for composition, thus accumulating the respective merits of the Dutch and the Italians. English novelists, like Dutch painters, have almost all been exclusively concerned with the particular; and though Balzac is not a profound thinker, how alert and wide in his interests he appears when compared with the great English novelists! He is a full man, hardly less interested in ideas than in passions.

It has been argued, I think by the admirable M. Faguet, that Balzac's habit of divagation impressed Flaubert like a cautionary tale, and was thus responsible for his refusal to comment upon what he described. In our own time we have seen brilliant essayists tempted by the popularity of the novel to express their critical opinions in the form of fiction. Many of us have therefore inclined to crack up the 'pure' novel. But after re-reading a great deal of Balzac, and of Proust, I believe the demand to be based largely on a false analogy. Not even Flaubert's novels are pure in the sense that a fugue, a triumphal arch or a painting by Braque can be pure; and attempts at pure fiction have resulted in mere gibberish. The only valid laws in the arts, as in the sciences, are

those that summarize experience. Flaubert's criticism of ideas and social behaviour may be kept rigidly implicit but is no less pungent than the open argumentation of Zola or Peacock. Strip Balzac's novels of his comments, and you would lose far less that is new and true than if you similarly mutilated Proust, but you would disastrously impoverish their effect. The case I have been trying to make for Balzac (I hope without minimizing his faults) is part of a wider plea. To require every artist to be a 'pure' artist seems to me almost as futile as to require him to be a propagandist. The titans of the Romantic Movement were all indiscreet, and given to over-emphasis—Hugo, Delacroix and Berlioz no less noticeably than Balzac. It is the critic's business to discover and expose the merits and defects of a work; but after this analytic process he must remember that the work itself is a synthesis, in which the defects are frequently inseparable from the merits.

JOHN PIPER

FRANCES HODGKINS

ONE patch after another of seagull-dotted, pine-fringed waste appeared out of the summer morning fog as the early train dragged from Poole to Wareham. From there, after a wait, the Corfe and Swanage single-track puffer went through more fog and more waste until it emerged from the Corfe cutting into sunlight. In the streets of Corfe village a tank was parked, but there were no charabancs and no shirt-sleeved hikers with pipes and haversacks, no evidence of a heavy sale of picture postcards or guide books or Brownie films, nothing to disturb the atmosphere of wartime peace. Beauty spots are only peaceful in wartime; then they can be seen for what they are. Corfe this summer morning was not a Gem of Old Tourist England. Seen from the square, the castle poked silver-grey ruined walls into the thinning mist, suggesting ill-assorted artists—Richard Wilson, Arthur Rackham, Cotman and Edmund Dulac. Then it suggested

a subject for any artist, and then a view for everybody—for nobody in his senses could fail to enjoy it.

Frances Hodgkins has her studio down a side lane. She has very likely never painted the castle at all, but her pictures have the same appeal that the castle had on that morning. They are subtle in colour and suggest a glory beyond their subject and their material. She is not everybody's painter as Corfe is everybody's castle, but she ought to be. Her studio is a converted Dissenting Chapel—not so converted, either—and nothing could be more suitable. It has height and space and a serious air.

She was born in New Zealand. She came to England about forty years ago and was made a teacher—the first woman teacher—on the staff of Collerossi's in Paris where she organised a class of her own. Later on she came to England on a visit, and made it her home. Since then she has worked much in France and Spain and her painting grounds in Britain have been Wales, East Anglia, Shropshire, Somerset and anywhere else where the light and colour demanded attention. Pictures of hers hang in public galleries here and in New Zealand. She has designed textiles, taught much and painted more. Her academic training, her natural talent for drawing, her teaching experience are all important. There is little data among her exhibited work to go on for evidence of the kind of work she had been doing until a few years ago. It was something like this. First, constant drawing of the figure and of nature, often with a precise black line and definite tone—drawings that made right or wrong statements more often than they made mere suggestions. Second (concurrently, not chronologically) portraits which said more about the character of models than about surface features. Third, decorative paintings, some of them very large, in which colour mostly did the honours. These are all personal, all recognisably by the same hand. They are research works, useful and beautiful, but without final unity.

The age of an artist is not often significant. Artists may do their best work at twenty and then get worse, or at forty and then get neither better nor worse; they may consistently improve till they are a hundred or consistently deteriorate after childhood. But for an artist to do by far her most interesting work after sixty is a phenomenon that needs explaining.

Painting is difficult enough anyway, but a woman painter, if she is going to be a woman painter and not an imitation man painter,

has an enormous task added: she has to create a woman's standard. For a young student, of either sex, the biggest task is to realize what painting *can be*; what a good painting means in terms of spiritual experience, vision, manual dexterity and so on. It is easy to be overcome by a vision of giants, easier still to undervalue the giants. The extra problem for a woman is created because giantesses are very rare. Few women painters manage to make a standard for themselves at all; on the whole sixty is decidedly young to do so.

Frances Hodgkins' standard was not suddenly found or invented; it was formed on long experience. Ten or twelve years ago she forgot her apprenticeship for good and began to rely on experience. The spirit of the age was a help. Something in contemporary painting or contemporary life gave the order of release. But her production would have been thin or boneless or merely homely but for her background of precise drawing and decorative experiment.

As it is, she has covered ground that belongs to no other artist. Colour harmonies and contrasts are her painter's language and there is no describing them. An attempt means borrowing words from music and pyrotechnics and several other arts, it means talking of scintillations and explosions, chromatic runs and exciting leaps, and it means talking nonsense all the time. But it is worth saying that her colour constructs as well as decorates. It describes the space between near objects and far ones, planes of ground and buildings, coruscations of trees against other trees and against the sky. It is colour that delivers the goods as well as advertising them.

'Still-life' was always a bad description and she has made it a worse one. She has painted flowers in gardens, in pots on window sills, in urns and jugs and vases, relating them to distant fields or Welsh hills or Spanish mountains. She has painted shells on tables and related them to a distant sea. She has painted jugs and related them to other jugs. These have been 'still-life' paintings with about as much stillness as a marching regiment of soldiers, which they resemble slightly in order and force.

She has a sense of place. The exciting gloom of parts of the Welsh coast, damp hollows with small sluggish rivers in Somerset—she substantiates one's feelings for such places. And she has a sense of the times. As this is wartime and as she is a good

painter her recent art is war art. It is not of tank traps or of gun emplacements, but she has found in the much-quarried man-disturbed ground of Purbeck Island subjects that are symbolic enough: railed-in areas, concentration camps, of rusty milk-cans, farm implements in disuse or dereliction, a man plucking a fowl in an outhouse. Described, these subjects are apt to sound simply 'modern'. In fact they are of the times and timeless. They are powerful and extraordinary, and are about humanity and its fate. She could be if she wanted to be the most charming and taking artist alive. She has done better; she has been serious and tenacious. And most important of all, she has never pretended that she was not a woman.

TOM HARRISSON

WAR BOOKS

I WAS lying in the marsh near the small pond at the bottom of Gurney's meadow, my face in the mud and the black mud beginning to ooze through the spaces between the fingers of my outstretched hands, drunk, but not blindly so, for I seemed only to have lost the use of my limbs. The tough damp marsh grass tickled below the ear and around the eyes. The mud smelt good, and I pressed my right cheek down flat upon it, seeing with my left eye the dim shapes of trees, like giants guarding beneficently the field of a dream, at the upper end of the meadow, and beyond the trees a few small stars, jolly in the immense darkness. Oh, I could have cried for joy and peace! I dug my toes into the soft ground, then raised myself a little on my elbows because the point of a long reed had penetrated one of the interstices of my hard dress shirt. Then I bit off a portion of another reed and sucked the white pith. I rolled over on my side, and some water squirted cool over the collar at the back of my neck.

If I could write one-fifth as well as Rex Warner has done in that first paragraph of *The Aerodrome*, and if I had ever worn a stiff shirt, this is the sort of thing I would have liked to have started saying myself, this moment. For this is the extraordinary

moment when I have to face up to two years of midnight reading. For two years, urged on by the editor of *Horizon*, I have read literally every book which has anything to do with the war, reportage, fiction or fantasy. Every month I have tried to sum up my curious learning into a report for *Horizon*. Month after month I have let the editor down. For I have become totally, immeasurably bogged, engrossed in bad reading. Ninety-five per cent of it is stuff I would never have read, or even imagined could be written, before. 300 pages at 8s. 6d. a time.

I have read *Secret Weapons* and *Attack Alarm*. I have seen how *Cheerfulness Breaks in* (via Angela Thirkell), why *The Wounded don't cry* (Q. Reynolds) and *Men do not Weep* (Beverley Nichols's latest and greatest horror). I have staggered through the anti-Semitism of Douglas Reed's *A Prophet at Home*, and sailed through the pleasant, easy documentation of Leo Walmsley's *Fishermen at War*. I have been borne through the air on *Bombers' Moon*; *Flying Wild*; *A Flying Visit*; *Winged Love*; *Air Force Girl*; *Wellington Wendy*; *Fighter Command*; *Fighter Pilot*; *Readiness at Dawn*; *R.A.F. Occasions*; *Mysterious Air Ace*; *Shadow of Wings*; *War News had Wings*; *Winged Words*; *Wings of Victory*; *War in the Air*; *So Few*. Never have I felt that I owed so little to so many. I am now reasonably competent to act as an international agent for any power after reading *The Death of Lord Haw-Haw*; *Death to the Fifth Column*; *Pointdexter Crashes the Fifth Column*; *I, Spy*; *The Spy in Khaki*; *The Spy Who Died in Bed*; *The Admiral was a Spy*; *The Black Baroness*; *The Black Cripple*; *The Woman in Red*.

I have been thoroughly trained to peace-aim the rusty musket of my mind after digesting Balbus's *Reconstruction and Peace*; Cardinal Hinsley's *The Bond of Peace*; Frank Pick's *Paths to Peace*; Lord Cecil's *A Real Peace*; Lord Davies's *Foundations of Victory*; Tom Wintringham's *The Politics of Victory*; Dr. Gretton's *Victory begins at Home*; Stephen King-Hall's *Total Victory*, and Touche's *Britain's Lost Victory*. Then there are what I can only describe as the 'en route books', like Sir Richard Acland's *The Forward March*, Prof. Julian Huxley's *Democracy Marches*, Prof. Harold Laski's lively *Where Do We Go from Here?*, Prof. Joad's boring *Journey Through the War Mind* and Virginia Cowles' superficial journey *Looking for Trouble*; these bracket over into anonymous books such as the sickening *Way of Life* (by 'A Soldier') or *Safer than a Known Way* (by Odysseus). Then, of course, there are *Guilty Men*

by Frank Owen, Michael Foot and Peter Howard; *Innocent Men* by Peter Howard; and *Guilty Women* by Richard Baxter. There is a bit of guilt in Anthony Weymouth's *A Psychologist's Wartime Diary*; a good deal of guilt in the weird *Metal Man's Wartime Diary*, published by the Quin Press at Eynsham, Oxon. Many of our lady novelists have reflected the paper war—Phyllis Bottome, Leonora Eyles, Helen Ashton, Daphne du Maurier, Vera Brittain, Storm Jameson, Ursula Bloom, Tennyson Jesse, Margery Allingham (*The Oaken Heart* is pointed, yet disappointing), E. M. Delafield, Naomi Jacob and Naomi Royde-Smith—hats off to Naomi Mitchison quietly cultivating harsh lands in the Mull of Kintyre.

I have read all this conglomeration, chaotic effluvia of a world confused. The most striking thing is the large number of different writers who have poured out indifferent material; the very small number of writers who have trickled out anything at all interesting. Faced with this enormous printed problem, it is natural that I have kept on postponing the day of my own judgements. A day which must also (if I am to be honest) seal the unfortunate fate of any book I may myself ever write and want reviewed. To say all I'd like to say about these books would involve a big book. In the meanwhile, I can do no more than summarize and select a few outstandingly interesting books and a few outstandingly uninteresting ones. I will try briefly to pick up from the mud on my living room floor the pleasant reeds. No doubt some of the mud will come up too.

First, it is possible to detect certain definite periods of war literature, despite the considerable time lags and overlaps of printing and publishing.

1. The war in the country, and the *evacuation novels*. This first spate of war books began early in 1940 and consisted mainly of soft novels about the way the townspeople had impacted upon and upset the countryside. Most of them showed the evacuee in a poor light; and sometimes the adult evacuee was an enemy agent, while the young evacuee often brought bad luck, upset the novelist pattern of the village, etc. The early war books were very distinctly middle-class and often distinctly unsympathetic to the 'masses'. Nowadays country books are kinder: usually have R.A.F. hero, villain spy.
2. Also about this time, and a little after, came *diaries*, notebooks, and books compiled from letters sent to friends in America. The evacuee and country theme soon got boring, and there was not a great deal in it from the novelist's point of view. Well-known writers started giving us their random jottings,

which involved very little work and a lot of space, often filled in by going as far back as Munich for the beginning of the diary. The most interesting of these, a book which should be compulsory reading for all nice-minded people, is Lord Elton's *Notebook in Wartime*. This book contains little about the war; and an enormous amount against 'intellectuals', 'Communists' and Russia. Communism and Intellectualism were, until June 23, equally an easy first among the bogies in war books. Among the fruitiest diary 'entries' are those entitled *The Versailles of the Intellectual* (Lord Elton is still at the stage of finding T. S. Eliot unbearably modern and degenerate); *One of the Prophets*, a vituperative attack on the late Havelock-Ellis and his researches on sex; *Decadence*; *The Critics*, one of his many denunciations of the young, which contains, among other things, this amusing passage:

'What do these men say of the British Commonwealth now? On the whole, I fancy, very little. Even now what they see, I gather, is not a world-wide Commonwealth defending the British way of life, but a British Government, soon to be constituted as a Popular Front à la *New Statesman*, fighting with some militarily useful but politically irrelevant assistance from the Dominions, to rehabilitate the defeated revolutionary movements of Europe.'

3. *Dunkirk books*. Dunkirk at last gave people something to write about, and they wrote. Novels and reportage books are still coming out about escape through France after the Vichy peace. These books are distinctly above the general average, largely because written by people who had never before written a book, but had had such an exciting experience that there was something automatically interesting and easy to write about.
4. *R.A.F. books*. When our fighters were winning the 'Battle of Britain' books began to pour out idealizing the pilot.
5. *Blitz books*. When the heavy raids began. These are, unfortunately, still coming out. They completely reverse the earlier process, for now the working-class are one hundred per cent heroes. Extravagant admiration is lavished without regard for modesty, dignity or accuracy.
6. *International espionage*, V for Victory and political warfare books. These have been stepped up lately, as the result of increasing interest in these subjects and in the possibility of revolution on the Continent.
7. *Peace books*. These also have increased lately; I include here not only serious books about the peace, but popular novels, etc., recapturing peace nostalgia and peace atmosphere.

Through most of these books there runs one definite note, which has, if anything, gathered strength as war publication has worn on. This note is the one termed 'right-wing'. In peacetime the left-wing note was very strong in a great deal of literature, and by 1939 a left-wing slant had become easily predominant over even a middle slant in current literature. Right-wing writers

were in a somewhat inferior position. The war has reversed that situation. (I must add that I am a wingless bird in this matter, am only describing the fliers.) This is the day of the right-wing writers—Lord Elton typical. War always gives a better opportunity to the narrow-minded and the intolerant, the tired man, whether Lieutenant-Colonel or literary agent. War makes it respectable to say jingoistic things about our own minorities, mean things about other majorities. In wartime it is socially difficult to criticize; easy to be uninformed and uniformed. Moreover, this war has given a particular advantage to the elderly. Bevin-pressure on every young person, male or female, has effectively prevented them from having appreciable spare-time or independence or influence. That is perhaps necessary, but some of the unfortunate consequences are particularly reflected in the fields of intelligence and culture. The men with fossilized minds, the slack middle-aged, the boys who had their minds made up before the last war, ride high in the saddles of power and prestige, commerce and culture; they still have the time, the opportunity, the outlet and the security. So, reading books published now, one finds again and again renovated prejudices and antagonisms of the old and the ultra-conservative (previously dormant). To judge from most war books, Britain is fighting this war to protect the world against Auden and Picasso, the Jews and any form of collectivism. In the novels, particularly, there are several frequent themes:

1. *Anti-left.* Continuous side tracking and caustic comments on Russia or any form of socialism. It is amusing to read back over these books now that Russia is our Ally. In two years of war writing, Russia emerges as hopeless, helpless, disunited, on the verge of revolution, as Fascist as Germany, militarily incapable of standing up to anything.
2. *Anti-intellectual.* It is common for war books to blame the war on something. Most commonly they blame (often with bitter violence) the intellectual, the young man, the allegedly feeble character, who is continually mixed up with the Pacifist, the Communist, the Socialist, the undergraduate and the poet. Often it is the intellectual who breaks up the decencies of the wartime home, or who argues away against normal war action. Repeatedly the intellectual is written off as something different and someone completely out of date and of the past—the gutless past to which many of the authors of these books so energetically subscribe.
3. *Anti-Semitism.* After reading only a few of these books I began to notice that if the villain or shady character or spy was not a painter, he was probably a Jew. Thereafter I made an index of anti-Semitism in all the books. Nearly

half worked in a Jew somehow or other, and only in one case was the reference not unfavourable.

These are the scape-goats of wartime literature, which one comes across in all sorts of book and from all sorts of writer. They are contrasted unfavourably with certain heroes who are also common to the majority of war books:

1. The simple working man, usually the Cockney, and in nine cases out of ten either a char lady or a taxi driver. This character usually speaks for the unshakeable people of Britain, untainted by Communism, and for that matter untainted by anything else, except a pint of beer or an occasional bomb story in which the Cockney invariably shows heroic stoic qualities. Only one book shows any real critical appreciation of the working-class mind in these astonishing months—a badly written little book printed privately by its author, the Vicar of Haggerston (H. A. Wilson), a Hackney Parish, the book entitled *Death Over Haggerston*. At the other end of the scale are the almost sickening effusions of Americans glamorising, from the Dorchester and Lansdowne (which keep on dominating the text), the ordinary man whom they have never met except to interview. Typical of these latter books are the ones by Quentin Reynolds, Ben Robertson, Ralph Ingersoll, Negley Farson, and Claire Boothe. There are also a couple of pretty terrifying books in this pastoral category by Australians, and British journalists are weighing in pretty heavy too, as the titles alone imply: *Heroes All*, *Here too is Valour*, *England's Hour*, *Our Finest Hour*, *Their Finest Hour*, *Hospitals under Fire*, *Fire Over London*, *Carry On London*, *The Londoners*, *The Lesson of London*, *Hell Came to London*, *Grim Glory*.
2. R.A.F. heroes, three-quarters of whom are D.F.C.'s. These are largely, of course, the same people who are attacked as the decadent youth of 1939, a point delicately overlooked by authors who like it simple.
3. Crippled heroes of pure British (generally aristocratic or near-Etonian) extraction.

You see, much wartime writing has got itself into a mess. Two years of it resolutely ignore the vast pattern of change of which we are now part, playing up the traditional and orthodox themes and aspects, emphasizing the personal heroisms and frequently falsifying them. Ignored are the fascinating uniformities, compulsions, mechanisations and masses of this war. Ignored also the economic pressures, and the industrial background, except a little in *Delayed Action*, by Hugh McGraw, who might one day write well. These war writers are reasonably well-off, and almost without exception underaware of what is going on among the mass of the people. There have been a number of books by officers in the R.A.F. and the Army, but not one by the far larger

number of people in the ranks. There are many books about evacuees or blitzes, but none by working people who have been evacuated or blitzed. Thus we get an exceptionally one-sided picture of a time which is three-sided, and when the understanding and interpretation which literature should give is more important than it has been for some time past. Reading scores of these books, one gets a picture which is almost grotesque when compared with even a superficial visit to the Clyde shipyards, or the great iron industries of the Midlands, the M.T.B. patrols which go across the Channel, Chislehurst Caves, or the Wrekin by-election. I am the last person to imagine that literature is ever representative of the popular mood or of all the great pressures of a period. But it should surely catch and at times transcend some of the deeper feelings, including some not yet apparent to the student or the analyst.

There is one side of the war which is particularly vivid, dramatic, novel and intense, and which has therefore received the most literary attention. The war in the air satisfies common emotions underlying both creative writing and creative fighting. For the first two years of war a lot of people wrote about the R.A.F., while the R.A.F. had very little to say about itself. Recently, however, there have been several outstanding attempts at informed statement about the Air War; and ahead of them, exciting, imaginative Rex Warner's fantastic *The Aerodrome*, which he calls a love story. I imagine most of it was written before the war. Yet he captures, more nearly than anyone else so far, the tense struggle of the 1940's. I dislike what I tend to regard as the phoney-fantastic, and I formed a pretty lukewarm opinion of Warner's previous novels in the same style—*The Wild Goose Chase* and *The Professor*. But every time I have opened and read again passages from *The Aerodrome*, the shock that I got from first reading it, early this year, has been renewed, with added point. It brings out, perhaps even more than Warner intends, the way in which the struggle of this time is a struggle not only between Axis Fascism and democratic liberties, but also a struggle, within as well as without, between ethics of individualism and collectivism, of liberty to the extent of anarchy and liberty severely controlled by necessity. Clash, crude and largely unnecessary, nevertheless violent; between modern mechanical developments of mass produced scientific discovery, aeroplane and Air

Marshal *versus* the old, slow ethic of agriculture, the land and Lord Gort. Read, side by side, in alternate spare hours, Warner's *Aerodrome* and Gort's *Dispatches*—not Ian Hay's jollied-up version, but the original supplement to the *London Gazette* (Is., Stationery Office). Parts of Gort (e.g. the sections on Intelligence, Censorship, Communications and Propaganda) are almost pathetic in their honest simplicity. Don't forget that despite all the now-knowing talk about the Maginot Line and its associated Mentality, only one person spoke against it. And what a fuss the press made when the schoolboy son of Field-Marshal Lord Ironside (of Archangel) came back from the Western Front and was asked what he thought of the Maginot Line, replied 'not much'. It took a child to see through the fantasy of self-security which experts had built up there and maybe it takes a child to see clearly the fantasy securities we are still building up to protect ourselves against the barbed implications of our own war organization and post-war world. Warner's Air-Marshal addresses his men in the chapel, two converging spotlights upon him, and ends a long speech with these words:

'Let me remind you finally of the pseudo-suchians, reptiles of an exceedingly remote period, whose clumsy efforts resulted in the course of ages in that incredibly finely-organized and adjusted thing, the first flyers, the race of birds. Science will show you that in our species the period of the physical evolution is over. There remains the evolution, or rather the transformation of consciousness and will, the escape from time, the mastery of the self, a task which has in fact been attempted with some success by individuals at various periods, but which is now to be attempted by us all. Your preliminary training has been exhausting, your discipline will continue to be exact, though the period of your hardships is over. But this discipline has one aim, the acquisition of power, and by power—freedom.'

There have been several interesting books by R.A.F. officers, mostly necessarily anonymous. Two of these are extremely readable and interesting, partly because they tell us truth about the R.A.F., cutting away from the ballyhoo of books written by outsiders lacking either information or insight. *Fighter Pilot* and *Readiness at Dawn* are two of the better documentaries of the war, particularly the latter, written by an officer controlling the movements of fighter aircraft. In a rather disjointed manner, it gives a full and adequate picture of actual life on an aerodrome, from the officer end. For instance a picture of the Controller of Operations, 'Havanna', who perpetually complains that he is only

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a Flight Lieutenant, whereas he should be a Squadron Leader and paid accordingly:

The telephone rang, and Havering said: 'Group wants Controller.' Havanna listened impatiently.

'Quite impossible,' he said in the voice of a man refusing a child's request for a party. 'Not only impossible, but ridiculous.'

'That was the Group,' he explained to Havering and Roger, 'asking us to send a section down over the coast. Can't they read? Haven't they looked at the weather report? Haven't they studied the weather forecast?' and he retired to his seat.

'I don't know,' said Havering, rubbing his bald head, 'he never minds what he says to Group, and they always seem to take it from him.'

'No interceptions without promotion,' muttered Havanna, chewing a pencil and then beginning to tear paper into patterns.

From this book one gets a truly interesting picture of the Air Force life, falsified in so many accounts. *England is My Village*, by a Flight-Lieutenant (killed in action), contains several moving short stories of flying. But the fullest marks here go to the Air Ministry itself, which in this as in so many other respects has shown itself ahead of other Ministries in appreciating the value of public understanding and goodwill. Their two official booklets, and especially *Bomber Command*, are first-class jobs of documentation, superb stuff, superbly done. Both were written by Hilary St. George Saunders, peacetime librarian of the House of Commons, and writer of best selling thrillers.¹ If only every Government department took on best-sellers to write lots of books about it, public morale and war enthusiasm would greatly benefit, while my own morale would vastly improve, in that I should be spared many of the books that I am now writing about. I might have been spared, for instance, *Figures in the Blackout*, by Kate Mary Bruce. The blurb accurately sets the book's tone:

Gabriel and Gordon, who had built castles on the sands as children, made a hasty boy-and-girl marriage in the last war. Separation brought its inevitable problems, and when Gordon returned a cripple, he found a wife awaiting him, who had been unfaithful.

A typical extract from this work:

The dining-room was blue with R.A.F. boys. Gabriel felt they were a race

¹ Mr. Saunders writes his best-sellers with a friend under the nom de plume of Francis Beeding, and has lately published another which he calls *Not a Bad Show—a War Thriller*. It is most interesting to read this adventure of secret agents and secret weapons beside *Bomber Command*.

apart, gods, not men. There was nothing too good for them. Peter was imitating a performing seal. Simon threw biscuits at him and he caught them in his mouth. His slithery, floppetty movements and hoarse, imperious bark were perfect. Rene was drinking neat whisky.

Or I might have been spared Bruce Graeme's *Son of Blackshirt*—the saga of Blackshirt, the gentleman cracksmen (Fascist not only above the waist) has sold more than 1,000,000 copies. This book is particularly interesting because it is the story of the cracksmen's son, an R.A.F. pilot—D.F.C. and D.S.O. of course—and how he behaves at the *end* of this war, on demobilization. There is a fascinating description of the pilots assembling to consider their post-war world, and of how they decide to become high-minded kidnappers and burglars. The other end of the chain in confirming the implications of Rex Warner's novel, here is a bit from one of the long introspects which Bruce Graeme's hero swoons into whenever there is a delay in the vigorous action of the story:

In heaven's name! he wasn't proposing to make a career of crime, was he? To-night he was enjoying the thrill of a strange and rather fascinating adventure but it was unlikely that he would ever again find himself in comparable circumstances. Why, then, was he preparing for the future? He frowned his perplexity. For some unaccountable reason he felt himself to be a different person from the man who that morning had so light-heartedly left the aerodrome with the intention of celebrating the signing of the armistice. What had caused that change? He could think of no reason. In fact, he found it difficult to analyse what the chance was. He had always been adventurous in spirit—that was why he had volunteered for flying duties with the R.A.F. He had always been daring—it was his daring which had earned him his coveted decorations. For months he had experienced a satisfying enjoyment from prowling about in the black heavens—hence his success as a night-fighter. But to-night this different type of night-prowling seemed to revive an enigmatical but rapidly crystallizing familiarity.

Needless to say it all works out, for during one of his burglaries he discovers (by a remarkable chance) that he is really 'Viscount Roslyn, the grandson of Lady Redbrook'.

Maybe I would have been spared *Wellington Wendy* by Oliver Sandys ('the most loved of English novelists' say her publishers, who have been in the business since 1812, so ought to know). Sandys has written over twenty successful novels, and this one tells how a girl, left a fortune, gives the whole of it to buy a Wellington bomber, then goes to work on a Welsh farm to avoid excited journalists. On her way she meets a young man who tells her:

'I am going to take up work on a farm. I am going to be a farm servant. Who with? Two women named Rees whose brother has recently died. That's all I know. I answered an advertisement in the *Farmer's Weekly*. And I can milk, plough, hedge and look after cattle and sheep.' He thought he had silenced her, but he had not.

'Agriculture. Then you're a Pacifist.'

That all works out right, too, for the pacifist agriculturist is converted to belligerency when the village boy, Marmaduke, is shot by a parachutist:

He stood very still for a few moments looking down on Marmaduke. Then he drew Wendy's hands from her face. 'Don't cry. Listen to me, there's more in you than tears. There is more in me too. There is resolve in me—indomitable. Hear my vow. I make it in your presence and by the body of our friend. I will never rest until in my own way I have avenged his death. This is my personal war. God, and you, are my witnesses.'

Wendy dried her tears.

'He—was magnificent—wasn't he?'

'Superb. He was a warrior in Sharon.'

'He loved Sharon.'

'He loved Hyacinth Street too.'

Wendy's voice quavered.

'It makes one feel almost sure of afterwards.'

I might have been spared *Shadow of Wings*, by Stella Morton, one of those stories about a family in the war with smattering of evacuees and the usual pacifist-intellectual son, who meets a middle-aged woman who 'influences' him:

She had half-expected him to be cynical and modern, and his quiet reply had surprised her.

This woman certainly is an influencer:

She leaned forward in her chair, her face grave, her eyes thoughtful.

'Jason,' she said, 'have you ever done anything a bit shabby and felt rotten about it afterwards?'

His face flamed, and he turned his eyes away to the fire.

'Of course. Dozens of times. Why?'

'How did you *know* you'd done a shabby thing?'

He looked up startled.

'What do you mean, how did I know? I don't know. I just knew, I suppose.'

She smiled a little.

'You wouldn't have known unless you'd realized you'd fallen below a standard, would you?'

He looked puzzled.

'I don't understand.'

'You say you are ill—unwell. How would you *know*, unless you realized that you had fallen below a standard of wellness? To recognize illness, to know

you suffer, you must also know health. Why, we even say it ourselves in our ordinary everyday speech, "I don't feel good." I feel I am below my own standard of good. It's the same with the shabby action. You feel blue about it, miserable, because you know you've fallen below a standard of decency.'

'Well, yes. I'd never actually thought of it, but I suppose that's right, really. But all the same, I don't quite see—'

'Just a minute, Jason. Having admitted that you have in your mind a standard of good, have you ever stopped to think what that means?'

He shifted his feet uncomfortably.

'Can't say I have.'

Her smile was the sweetest thing he had ever seen.'

And the influence, of course, is in the familiar direction; by p. 317, we reach the dramatic moment when Jason—the younger brother goading him as usual ('here's one gentleman who affirms that he wouldn't lift his arm to defend his mother even if she were attacked by a Nazi', etc.)—is able to deal with the situation:

Very deliberately, Jason lowered the paper, folded it carefully and stood up. Then, drawing a packet of cigarettes from his pocket he took one, lighted it, pitched the match into the empty grate.

'It might interest you to know,' he said to Tim, speaking with controlled ease, and blowing a cloud of smoke into the quiet room, 'that I have already resigned from the Bank and enrolled for service in the Royal Navy.'

When we come on to the Navy we come smack against the 'silent service'. There are one or two preposterous naval spy books, notably *McInnes of the N.I.D.*; *Wife Ashore*, by Josephine Field, the war experiences of a Naval Officer's wife, which is so boring and snobbish that it almost hurts to read through it, especially as it is written in the form of letters to her father. Typical passage:

Dear Daddy,

'As you know, I don't seek intellectual conversation. Heaven forbid. I wouldn't know how to compete with it. The only times I have had to try to look intelligent when in the presence of some real brain (yourself always excepted, darling!) I have gone clammy with apprehension, and hoped I was saying "yes" and "no" in the right places.'

Charles Graves, who used to be columnist of the *Daily Mail*, has done quite a competent descriptive book, *Life Line*.

When we come on to the Army it is literary starvation. Eric Linklater's *The Northern Garrisons* has the right idea, apparently cut about by security and other considerations, so that it is really only a letter from Iceland. Evan John, who wrote best-sellers in peacetime, has *Lofoten Letter*, a not very informative account of

the raid, full of the usual angles with which the reader of war books must inevitably become familiar, e.g.:

We have a very mixed bag on board. There is a Whitechapel Hebrew doing hush-hush and rush-rush repairs; he is to be put ashore before we go—presumably to return to London and tell all the Fifth Column there that we are about to attack Norway.

There is only one book which gives a serious and satisfying idea of the Army, and that is *Return via Dunkirk*, by 'Gun Buster'. This is a straight account of an artillery unit retreating from the Germans, absorbing in its graphic detail.

When we escape from the numerous books about the Services, via Dunkirk, we reach a richer field, the books of flight, capture or imprisonment. Most praised of the escape books have been those by Alexander Worth, C. Denis Freeman, Douglas Cooper, and Polly Peabody. To my mind there are two French escape books which stand out much above these or any other accounts of the same kind. The lesser of the two is *Capture*, by Bessie Myers, an ambulance girl who was captured in the German lines, put to work in a German hospital, dined and wined with German officers, was then imprisoned under frightful conditions in two Paris gaols, let out again, escaped to Vichy, met Pétain, tried for months to get out of France, finally succeeded. Myers, unlike Peabody and the rest, really got under the surface of the refugee business, though she is quite naive on politics or economics or anything of that sort. Even more successful is the second of the worthwhile escape books, Cicely Mackworth's *I Came Out of France*. She moved in the centre of fleeing chaos, largely on her own and at random. Her story is unaffected and humble, and gradually, almost unintentionally, builds up a kind of epic quality and sympathy which I cannot sufficiently admire. Miss Mackworth, who seems from her account to have been a 1930-40 borderline-of-art Montparnassian, has produced a book which somehow captures a little of the essence of one of the world's greatest months, without any of the skill or style or tension of Warner, but just in an ordinary way. Here is the humblest and most honourable contribution to war literature just as Lady Fortescue's *Trampled Lilies*, which tells of her escape via St. Malo with her dog, is the most self-centred and pretentious.

There is another book which is unstylized, naive, but which

does a real job of war writing. It is about the other end of the refugeeing, the German Jew, and is written as a novel by a Cambridge undergraduate, Alex Comfort. *No Such Liberty* is told as if it were the autobiography of a Jewish doctor, a process of creative misery at times nearly unbearable. Young Comfort, so unsuitably named, has got into the feeling of the terrible backward retreat from Hitler and 1933, the psychological flight across Europe and history, into the welcoming arms of 18-Bism, Huyton Camp and the Isle of Man. The doctor lives in the agony of his mind, turned out of his research work in London, while his wife is interned separately and loses their new born baby at the prison camp in the absence of any milk or care. The book leaves them released and waiting permission to go to America, with these final paragraphs:

In America they want me to take a professorial appointment and lecture. I think we shall be happy in a University town, because there are young people there and we shall grow backwards. But I shall have to lecture out of the book if there is nobody to prompt me.

Anna's coming now. The summer is over and they are reaping the oblong field on the hill opposite, by the larch wood, and I can hear the twitter of the reaper coming and going in waves, blotted and behind the wood, and coming over clearly from the hilltop. I can see the gold rhomb of corn getting smaller, and the blue puffs of shots when the rabbits bolt. I'm glad the boys don't seem to be hitting them. I suppose they, too, are refugees.

The harvest is nearly over. I've not been able to tell anyone the whole story before.

Perhaps to-morrow we shall be going out to find a new year.

The war goes on. But don't pray for the dead. Pray for us, the living. For Straub behind the wire. For the sad man, wherever he is.

Overdone in places, over-sentimental in ways, still this book does what any fine book should do—makes you realize something more than you knew before, alters by a little your feeling and focus and trust. In some ways, *No Such Liberty* is parallel to a fine book of the last war, E. E. Cummings' *The Enormous Room*; it is a piece of feeling carved clean out of the agony of war, which (blitz or not) a great many people, especially better-off people, have failed to know in Britain. In this war we are still largely starved of the real tragedies.

The tragedy of internment is told another way by Koestler in his *Scum of the Earth*. I admire Koestler's writing, but I was disappointed in this as compared with his other stuff. All through there is a mean tone. What worries me about Koestler, and so

many other and lesser writers, is the way they go out of their way to exaggerate the duplicity of Russia or the deceit of the Jews, or the decadency of the intellectual, according to their own occupation and prejudice. I feel profoundly perturbed, after reading all these war books, about the latent paranoia of a large section of the opinion-forming middle-class, and their consequent potentiality towards panic politics and post-war persecutions. Perhaps the most perfect expression of this war book tendency is provided in the macabre volume entitled *Wyckwood Chronicles*, written in a German prisoners-of-war camp by two young officers, Croft and Axford, from the Black Watch and the West Kents. According to Messrs. Hutchinson's preface:

Under conditions of utter discomfort, humiliation and boredom, crowded with a score or more in one small room in which they eat and sleep and pass monotonous hours, ill-clothed, living on a meagre diet of ersatz coffee, soup and potatoes for the most part, they write this book on sheets torn from exercise books, without the elementary advantages of privacy and quiet.

The consequent book is the strangest thing in war literature, and because of its circumstances, has a pathos which should lead many to buy it. The writing is more than amateur—it unfortunately attempts to be good writing. The framework is a series of letters from two married couples staying Christmas at a Cotswold hotel to a third married couple unable to be present (appendicitis). Nostalgically these two prisoners-of-war write the letters of four different people to their two selves about a peacetime Christmas in 1938. One recaptures in this book the real pre-Dunkirk spirit—presumably the authors do not realize that now all their talk about dinner-jackets is curiously out of mood, even in a peace book. And the villain is the only working-class character—that would never happen in a novel since the blitz. It is sad to think of these two gallant country gentlemen sitting in Oflag VIIIC and not guessing what has happened to their world, while they write, in all seriousness, stuff like this:

He was dressed for dinner in a dinner-jacket, obviously straight off the peg, and patent leather pumps with horribly pointed toes. As you might expect, his shirt was a soft one, pleated, with a stiff butterfly collar, and a clip-on tie. And his studs! He must have ransacked Woolworth's for his imitation sapphires. (Yes, you're quite right, he does sport a cheap brilliant on his ring finger.) A white waistcoat completes the *tout ensemble* of pure Brummagem—which, incidentally, is where he hails from.

In appearance he is not unlike the heathen Chinee! He has a wide forehead,

with long greasy hair brushed straight back, a sallow complexion and slightly almond-shaped eyes. And he polishes his nails!

His behaviour is as oily as his looks. He more or less thrust himself on Edward and me in the cocktail bar just now, and tried to insinuate himself into the conversation. He has trouble with his aitches, judging from the supremely careful way in which he handles them. I can just picture him, in the privacy of his own bedroom, practising on his wife, who seems a nice little thing, with such phrases as 'Has Herbert heard Harold's harpsichord?' and 'No, but he has hearkened to Harry's harmonica.' And he tries to show what a well-read fellow he is by quoting Shakespeare and Milton and the Lord knows what else besides! But breeding will out, and he uses the word 'bloody' far more than the occasion demands.

The German censors passed the MSS., perhaps as anti-democratic propaganda:

There is a book by other men, different prisoners, two of seven merchant seamen who took to their open boat when their ship was sunk in mid-Atlantic and alone survived the 70-day journey which took them to the Bahamas. Beside this epic of suffering, told in *Two Survived* (published by Hamish Hamilton), Captain Bligh's famous *Bounty* trip looks quite easy. To read how these two West Country working boys, Robert Tapscott and Wilbert Widdicombe, survived, hating each other, almost destroying each other in the final exhaustions of their hatred, is to go through a major emotional experience that you will not forget. When, after a long convalescence, they were eventually able to walk again, Widdicombe went home on a ship which was torpedoed, leaving Tapscott as the only survivor. The *Daily Express* serialized *Two Survived* in early November, and then, as a follow-up stunt, sought out Tapscott, the hero. They found him in soldier's uniform, peeling potatoes under discipline. His astounding experiences had led him back to land and the Army. The captain in charge of him said to the *Express* reporter:

'You will understand, I hope, that he's a good boy, but he's just a bit new to the Army, and he hasn't quite taken to discipline yet.'

There are several other much inferior books about Atlantic adventures, including *Life-Boat*, by Signe Toksvig, *The Island Demands*, by Humfrey Jordan, and *Prison Life on a Pacific Raider*, by two nurses escorting the first five hundred children evacuated to Australia. James Hanley's novel *The Ocean* deals with the same theme; Hanley seems to have gone stale.

There is another group of books I want so say something

about—the books about the blitz, especially on London. Unfortunately most of the people who wrote them and continue to write them, seem to think that they are producing epics for the future historian. Of course there's also the propaganda for America angle, with which one can sympathize. It would be unbearable, at this stage, to delve into all the rubbish that has been written about the people of Stepney and Coventry. But I shall be very surprised if anyone takes these books seriously a year after the Armistice. One of the most sensational is Basil Woon's *Hell Came to London*, which does at least have one interesting feature, in that the text is liberally bespattered with bomb noises:

'Whee-ce-ecsh . . . bloo-oomp!'

There are also an increasing number of novels set in a blitz atmosphere—almost always London. The blitz is often used as a sanction for spicy bits of immorality too—most amusingly put in *Whatho She Bumps!* by best-seller John Paddy Carstairs, somewhat over-adequately described by its publishers as giving 'A dash of Noel Coward, a spot of Hemingway, a soupçon of Evelyn Waugh and a trace of Arlen, with lashings of vastly entertaining, witty, hilarious Carstairs.' I would also recommend *Life is a Racket*, by Ann Wilson, whose heroine, Ray, is a fine blitz girl, always up to something, e.g. by page 3, 'psycho-analysing her father and Peter with the razor-keen insight of a girl in love, gave all her sympathy, as was only natural, to youth.' Peter, like so many young men in these books, comes back from Dunkirk severely wounded, this time in the head, though happily not in the mouth, about which Ray broods a good bit:

'Not for the first time she thanked heaven that Peter's military side-line hadn't inspired him to grow a moustache. You couldn't possibly have felt that possessive mouth of his burning against yours so ruthlessly and devastatingly if a moustache had to some extent intervened between his mouth and yours.'

It seems that the isolations of war, the retreats and imprisonments, the tensions of loneliness have produced most of the worthwhile war literature so far. The real character of this war, its multiple mass mechanizations, the random mathematics of its death, are hardly yet reflected in literature. But John Strachey has captured the Civil Defence spirit with insight in his little book *Post D*, vivid experiences of a Warden. And there are short passages on blitzes which have a genuine quality in the interesting romance

Hunger Allows No Choice, by Robert Westerby, who is by way of being an important writer; he gives the impression, though, of being, on the one hand, interested in writing well, on the other hand interested in selling a lot of copies, without having resolved the conflict or obtained the necessary co-operation between the two interests!

Finally, *Fifth Columns and Spies*. These are roughly divided into stories about German secret agents operating in Britain, and British agents operating on the Continent, the latter often penetrating successfully into highest quarters of Nazi authority. Most of the spies inside Britain are Britishers, and sometimes the reason why they are spies is not very clear. They either make secret signals to German aeroplanes or try to steal the plans of secret weapons. One is a senior official in the Ministry of Armaments (*The Spy who Died in Bed*), another is Chief of the County Special Constabulary (*They Watch By Night*), the most interesting, *The Black Cripple*, who is Carl Mendel, 'a swarthy, Jewish-looking man' (nevertheless 'the Fuehrer would always see him'). Mendel, like so many war book villains, is an art-dealer.

Some of the best fun is provided when the spy operates in a small country village. It is extraordinary the way a parachutist can live in a village for weeks without anybody realizing it. Then he gets nasty and draws his small-arms. It is at such moments that magnificent morale of the British is at its highest—nowadays it is usually a working-class character who downs the parachutist with an umbrella or some similar weapon. Mrs. Beckett, for instance, in *Staying Put*, defeats the enemy with a dart which she (an otherwise normal woman) happens to have in her pocket.

But the weirdest of all the home-spy books is *Let the Storm Burst*, by Countess Barcynska (the nom-de-plume of Oliver Sandys); it is a Bunyanic allegory of a country boarding house at war, with young Yello, the conscientious objector, kindly Mr. Verity and Miss Faithful ('my nephew is in the Air Force and he tells me that whenever we are given the figures we are told the truth'), profiteerish Mr. Riche (he constantly refers to 'Mr. 'Itler'), the historian Mr. Delve, and the enemy agent and secret-weaponer, Mr. Fury. The high point of the book, after Fury's liquidation, is described in Miss Faithful's journal:

And most gratifying of all is young Yello. He bought Garth Farm to evade the Army. Now he has put another manager in charge who is over military

age and knows farming, and he himself has just been to see me, dressed in his soldier's uniform. He said he wanted to apologize for his rudeness some time ago, that he realized he was a rotter and was thoroughly ashamed of himself. I told him I had forgotten all about it.

One expects spy stories to be far-fetched, but really *The V Plan*, by Graham Seton (Lt.-Col. Hutchison, D.S.O., M.C.), dedicated to Col. Sir Cuthbert Headlam, D.S.O., M.P., is *too* weird, with its successful defeat of Germany through the invasion of France by a Channel tunnel. The groundwork is done by English agents, Colonel Grant and Major Baird, and they make use of the familiar façade for espionage:

'It is agreed,' said Grant, 'that the role of Baird is to be that of an artist. My friend Ponsot is already equipping a studio in Montmartre. Coshy Durston will be the model, so far as the studio is concerned. But the studio is also to be a blind for the making of maps and plans of French defences, a fake, of course, but of such absolute realism that when we are ready Dubois will be deceived. Dubois must be brought to that studio and be completely bluffed. That is the first task.'

'I can fix Dubois,' remarked Baird.

So Baird fixes Dubois by passing as 'a member of Left-Wing politics' and thus easily getting all the military secrets. Colonel Hutchison's previous book, *The W. Plan*, sold a quarter of a million copies; maybe this one will do better still.

Then there is *Shadow Crusade*, which tells how Sif John Howden and his Shadow Crusaders fought the Fifth Column in Holland; *Secret Weapons*, which tells how the British agent becomes one of the chief Nazi agents—a common trick, this, on the part of our Secret Service, most perfectly achieved by Woolf Sarason, *Special Agent*, whose exploits are recounted by Maurice Moiseiwitsch, originator of that tiresome radio character, Mr. Penny. Special Agent Sarason, who works for the Ministry of Army Co-Ordination, Beethoven fan and Britain's greatest Air Ace, friend of the Hon. Frankie Trumper, becomes one of the highest Nazi officials, so that he can get any secret by simply lifting it off somebody else's desk. Flying Officer Robin Lampeter, V.C., does about as well, on behalf of Lord Westinghaeme, an old-fashioned Cornish landowner, who is really secret head of the Secret Service.

Robin follows the well-worn literary track into the German High Command and out again with the secret plans. In another book, *Encore Allain*, the British agents actually escape in the

German Commander's private special tank, which they sink in a river just before reaching the Channel. Another V.C. is Major Clive Granville; he goes into Germany to look for his son Gerald, who had previously gone in to save a German chum from a concentration camp (*The Boy in Khaki*). Agent Norman Conquest goes in and out of Germany, and especially Buchenwald concentration camp, with priceless secrets (*Six Feet of Dynamite*). While the hero of *Not a Bad Show*, Roger Marples, working with Colonel Branby, gets into Germany after a secret weapon formula and is actually put in charge of a concentration camp. Richard Myles, a young Oxford Don, is almost as successful in *Above Suspicion*. We certainly seem to be a great deal superior to the Germans in this spying business, though they pulled a fast one on the Americans when one of their agents successfully replaced the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Navy. These books pale into stupidity beside the real thing, *I find Treason*, Colonel Rollins's authentic account of unearthing American subversive activities. Unbeatable in fiction is his account of the weeks spent microphone-recording the conversations of U.S. Fuehrer Fritz Kuhn (now in prison as a result), reaching high point when Kuhn tries to carve out a swastika with a razor-blade between his mistress's breasts.

★ ★ ★ ★

Well, that should provide a rough interim picture. It is going to be interesting to follow these ideas through into development or oblivion in the next two years of the war. So far, this has been overwhelmingly a war for superficial writers and journalists. Some journalists, William Hickey and J. L. Hodson, Alan Moorehead, Ritchie Calder and Godfrey Winn, have done a real job of digging under the surface; many have been satisfied with superficiality and a good salary. Unfortunately the difficulties of paper supply and publication favour the already over-conservative outlook of most publishers. Less than ever have they taken a chance with new authors. And one can hardly blame them for wanting to keep up the goodwill of their branded lines, the better-selling authors of peace. Naturally, they have taken and published any books by those whose names they have already made famous. And as there is a shortage of books, rapidly increasing, they can sell practically anything. They are naturally

reluctant, too, to experiment on new lines and authors when paper and man-power and advertising space are scarce and valuable. This largely explains the cataract of tripe. A lot of the authors I've been reading write tripe anyway. But I have taken the trouble, in several cases, to read back over some of their peacetime works. The wartime product is usually markedly inferior. The reason is not difficult to find. Most of these writers had developed techniques and themes of their own, in which the epic moments were individual disasters or excitements. To-day, the war has taken the whole stage in every country and in every life. It is harder to write large. The drama now is total, colossal, more than Ibsen or Gogol could contain; the remarkable power of Churchill is just that he has this gigantic imagination of drama and agony and blood, which simultaneously complicates for him the individual story, the industrial confusion or the woman power mess. Ordinary writers therefore find the reconstruction and rearrangement of life's events (literature) taken over, as it were, by the more powerful and less manageable pressures of gigantic war. It is difficult for them to ignore the war altogether, but even more difficult to work it into the familiar patterns of the family novel or the reporter's diary. Thus while many interesting and informative war books have been written, on the whole it is fair to say that the stuff has been lousy, a lot of it phoney.

Maybe I'm asking too much? I don't think so. We need some more wartime courage from publishers, some more encouragement from all sides for the younger writers, who are almost automatically nearest to the spirit of this time, and who at present have practically no opportunity to write. On my submission, we need now (more than for a very long time past) some of the intellectual leadership which sensitive writing and sensitive thinking can give. Not nearly enough thinking is being done in this war. You don't have to stop firing to think. Publishers are moaning about paper supplies for books, claiming privileges on the grounds of keeping culture alive. If the stuff that fills my bookshelves is democratic culture, then the paper control has been more than kind. I would estimate that eighty per cent of the paper used in publishing books now is devoted to books which even the publishers themselves regard as nothing more than money-making, without reference to culture. Eighty per cent

of the books couldn't conceivably do us any cultural credit in other countries, however high their pure entertainment, thriller or sex interest may be. Let the publishers do a little thinking and encouraging too.

★ ★ ★ ★

NOTE. the books particularly recommended above are:

The Aerodrome, by Rex Warner (Bodley Head).

No Such Liberty, by Alex Comfort (Chapman and Hall).

Two Survived (Hamish Hamilton).

I Came Out of France, by Cicely Mackworth (Routledge).

Return via Dunkirk, by Gun Buster (Hodder and Stoughton).

Bomber Command (R.A.F. Official).

Post D, by John Strachey (Gollancz).

Also recommended: *Captured*, by Bessie Myers (Harrap); *Readiness at Dawn*, by 'Blake' (Gollancz); *Fighter Pilot* (Batsford); *England is My Village*, by J. L. Rhys (Faber); *Hunger Allows No Choice*, by Robert Westerby (Methuen); *Delayed Action*, by Hugh McGraw (Michael Joseph); *Life Line*, by Charles Graves (Heinemann); *Through the Dark Night*, by J. L. Hodson (Gollancz); *Fishermen at War*, by Leo Walmsley (Collins); Lord Gort's Dispatches (H.M. Stationery Office); *I find Treason*, by R. Rollins (Harrap).

My thanks to Heywood Hill for his help in keeping me supplied with the flood of books I have required and for making sure I haven't missed any.

LETTER

WHY NOT WAR WRITERS:

Dear Sir,

You state, admirably, 'an artist must be in the war or out of it', thus explicitly denying the manifesto which bears your name. May I then, without offence, comment on that preposterous document?

What a picture of fun it makes of English writers! First, while Europe was overrun, they were 'hesitant'. Then one enemy fell out, over the division of the spoils, with his larger and wealthier partner. This welcome but not unforeseen diversion 'crystallized' our writers' 'feelings'. They are now for total war. So be it. To the less literary this reasoning seems fatuous, and, in the context, their expression 'the interest of their country' ambiguous, but it is no time to be nice about the terms of revelation. The roads to truth are devious and manifold. We, who have been in the war since the start, suffered a little from the lack of intellectual company; it was comforting to think of the book-reviewers and mass-observers and poets (of a kind) and Left-Book-Club-sub-group-assistant-organizing-secretaries, pouring in, with their crystallized feelings as

succulent crystallized plums, to join us in camp. If they want to write about the war, the way is clear for them. Writers whom, in spite of your Word-Controller, you persist in dubbing 'creative' differ from painters and journalists and photographers in that a single pictorial view of their subject is not enough. They must be, or have been, part of it. Whether they write now or later is a question of individual literary digestion. There is plenty of leisure in the armed forces—at any rate for the lower ranks. The atmosphere is uncongenial for writing, but that is all to the good. It has been too easy to write in recent years. Genius overcomes privation and inferiority. If these young men *must* write, they will do it the better for suffering some inconveniences. If they are under no immediate compulsion, let them sit tight and store their minds with material for future use.

But what do your chums propose doing? They will like to form an Official Group; they would go on jaunts to the Americas and Dominions; they would have 'the facilities of journalists' which, as far as I have seen, merely means the privileges of commissioned rank without its obligations—cheap railway tickets, entrance to ward-rooms and officers' messes and investitures; they would 'co-ordinate war-effort emotionally'. Cor, chase my Aunt Nancy round the prickly pear! The General Staff love initials; they would, I am sure, rejoice to put an armlet, D.A.E.C.W.E. on someone's arm and call him Deputy Assistant Emotional Co-ordinator of War Effort. But if anyone ever again feels disposed to raise the old complaint that the English fail to honour their living artists, let him remember their present modest demands.

I am afraid that I do not believe for a moment that these young men want to write; they want to be writers. It is the Trades Union move detecting a slight on their occupational dignity. They have been whimpering for years for a classless society, and now that their own class is threatened with loss of privilege they are aghast. That is the plain meaning of your manifesto.

Notice it is signed by a novelist who, later in the same issue, has a letter on the subject of O.C.T.U.s. Shades of Colonel Bingham! That officer made trouble for himself by injudiciously stating what few informed people disputed: that, generally speaking, the proletarian youths who are now being trained as officers have less sense of duty than candidates of gentle birth and humane education. It was injudicious to say this because the demand for officers greatly exceeds the supply of gentlemen, so nothing can be done about it. But the men in charge of O.C.T.U.s. have a difficult job, and Mr. Calder-Marshall is witness to their tolerance. One in three of their candidates are socialist, many of whom are sharp enough in memorizing the facts of their new trade. But duty? Consider a case of Mr. Calder-Marshall; he accepts an eagerly-sought vacancy and takes up three months of his instructors' time. They are trying to make him a leader in battle. But when he gets commissioned rank he makes no effort to serve the regiment who honour him with their badges, but uses his new position as a step to softer employment.

I may not sign my name to a letter dealing with military matters, but if anyone has any curiosity about my identity, please inform him.

Your obedient servant,

COMBATANT



Llangennith College Farm. Gouache. 1940.



Houses and Outhouses, Purbeck. Gouache. 1940

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